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OCTOBER 1993

ISSUE NO 20

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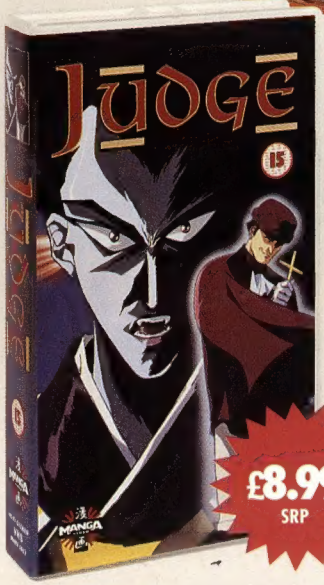

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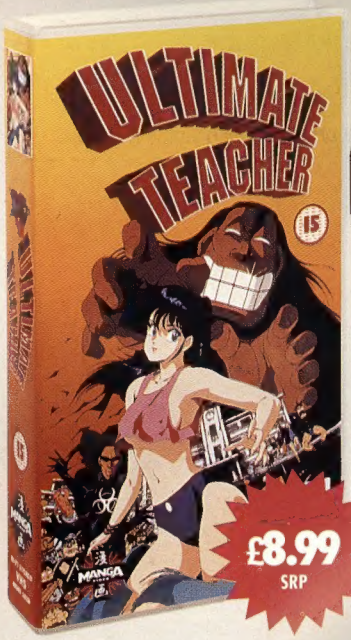

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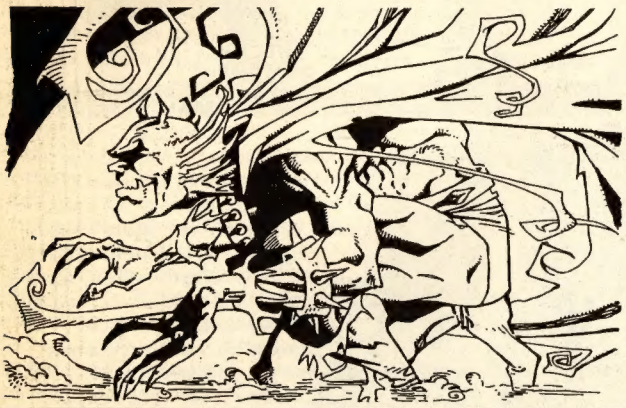

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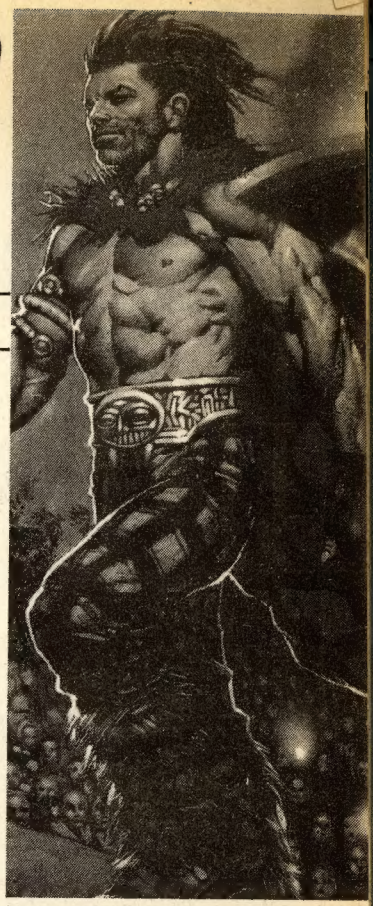

The only thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history.

In the early 1980s the comic industry was in the throes of a boom in independent publishing, new publishers attracted by the idea of a direct market and firm sales. In 1984 Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird produced the phenomenal hit, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and for two years it seemed that the independent publishers were putting out more collectable comics than any of the major companies. The bubble burst, as it had to, in early 1987 – the glut became a collapse, taking publishers, distributors and retailers with it. The black and white implosion. The reason? Simple greed.

The (oversimplified) facts are that some retailers began to overorder and hoard small run independent comics, the idea being that – as in the case of the Turtles – the price would inrease quickly for an artificially rare comic, the retailer would sell at much higher than cover price and reap vast profits. But by late 1986 nobody was really buying them – if you couldn't get hold of issue 1 no interest was generated for issue 2, and small publishers, over the moon with orders on issue 1, were overextending themselves, pushing out new titles like there was no tomorrow. And, of course, there was no tomorrow. There was no vast market to pick up unwanted titles at overinflated prices.

Now we have the colour glut. Between January and June 1993, Capital City Distributors listed 4,390 comics (some were variants of the same comic, but they're designed *to be bought). Total cost: nearly $10,460. That's an average price of $2.38 per comic, compared to 1992's average price of $2.14, an 11% increase.*

Marvel have been surveying the direct market, and found that most shops could move 90% of their stock within 90 days. Average orders through the direct market for the first half of the year were 32,136,740 units a month, 90% of which is sold within 90 days.

That's 3,213,674 unsold units every month, *or 38,564,088 a year, at an average price of $2.38. $91,782 529 in unsold stock spread over the direct market.*

Excuse the economics lesson, but that's a hell of a lot of money and the sort of thing that your local shop is going to worry about!

As Britain's 175 odd outlets makes up 8% of the direct market (and 8% of the product not moving), that's something like £28,000 in unsold comics every year per shop. Even if shops qualify for a 50% trade discount, they'll be carrying over £14,000 worth of dead stock a year, none of it returnable. And you wonder why some retailers complain about late shipping, poor or wrong information, and are starting to tighten their belts and take less risks in their buying policies.

Add to that the hot comics hoarded by some retailers awaiting the day the price would leap. Any other selling business based on turnover would laugh at the situation. Have you ever heard of a shoe shop hoarding trainers, waiting for the price to rise?

Of course, without experimentation the number of titles on offer drops, and small publishers without the cashflow to tide them over are going to go under: the colour implosion. Will it come? Is it happening now? Only history will tell.

But we're not likely to learn anything from it.

We didn't last time.

Steve

Contributors: Paul Birch, Neil Cooper, Tony Earnshaw, John Gosling, Phil Hall, Richard Hill, Richard Hudson, Dave McLoughlin, Pete Taylor, Ron Tiner, James Walsh and 'Our Man in Brighton'.

Figures used in this month's editorial were taken from Comic Buyers Guide #1031, August 20, 1993, and Sales to Astonish, October 1993.

Cover: Kiss my axe! Comic World welcomes back Glenn Fabry; two years in the making, Slaine: Demon Killer swings into Prog 852 of a 2000AD near you any day now. Slaine © Fleetway Editions, used by permission.

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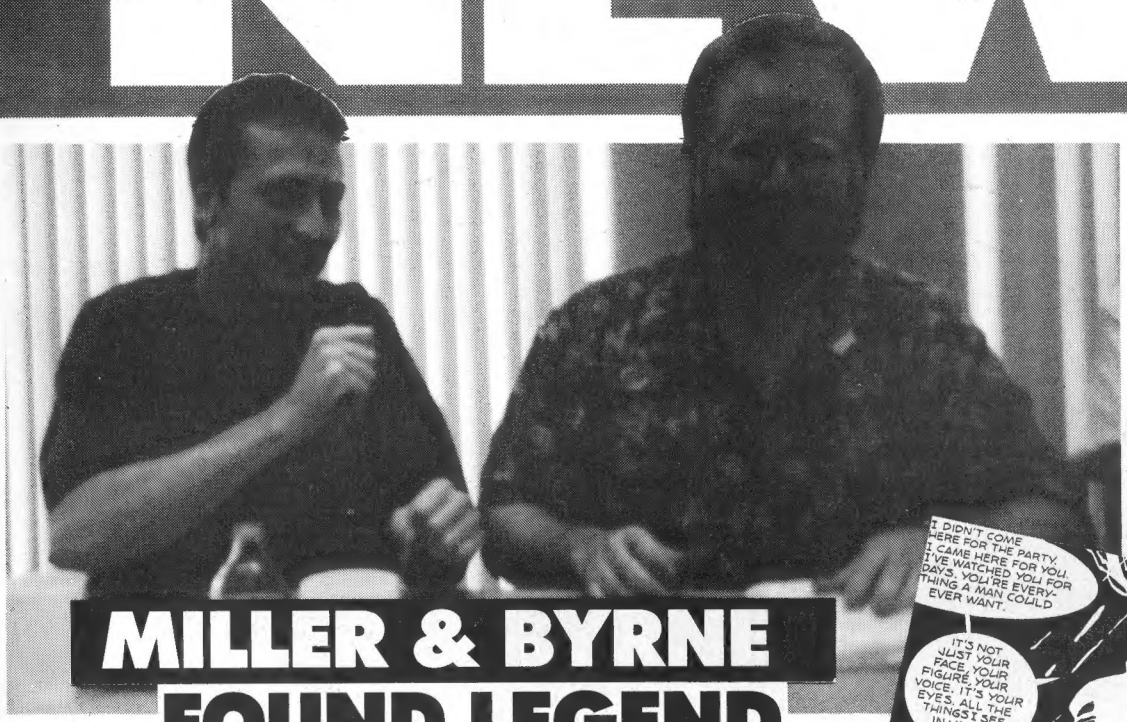
NEWS



MILLER & BYRNE FOUND LEGEND

Two legendary figures of the comic industry, Frank Miller and John Byrne, have founded a new imprint, Legend. To be published through Dark Horse, the Legend imprint will appear on the work of seven leading creators including Miller, Byrne, Art Adams, Paul Chadwick, Geof Darrow, Dave Gibbons, and Mike Mignola.

Unlike Image, Legend is an imprint rather than a publishing company, co-owned by Miller and Byrne and to be used on books created by the seven members of the group either solo or in collaboration. The logo can be carried by the creators to projects from other companies, although it is unlikely that the group will expand in the near future.

The first title to bear the logo will be John Byrne's ongoing Next Men series which will cease its regular numbering with #18. Due to ship in October is *Next Men: Faith #1*, the first of part of a new 4-part story arc; each subsequent story arc will be treated like a mini-series, although the book will continue its monthly schedule.

Byrne will also be launching a second series, *Danger Unlimited*, unrelated to Next Men, but described by John Dennett of Dark Horse as "everything John loves about superheroes that he can't do in *Next Men*. So this is where you're going to see costumes, time-travel, cosmic adventures, and all those things that superhero comics do so well but that are the antithesis of *Next Men*."

November will see the launch of *Sin City: A Dame to Kill For*, a six-issue mini-series continuing the story of Marv whose earlier adventure was serialised in *Dark Horse Presents*, later collected into graphic novel form. The latest Sin City will also be collected, with 15-20 new story pages which "have been removed for the sake of a more smoothly flowing storyline or to accommodate a chapter beginning or ending."

Other Miller projects will appear in 1994 (as will most of the Legend titles): with Dave Gibbons he will continue the *Give Me Liberty* series, a five-issue monthly series now entitled *Martha Washington Goes To War* (see our interview with Gibbons in *CW #17*). With Geof Darrow Miller has *Rusty the Boy Robot and The Big Guy* which is "completely and totally unlike anything anybody has ever seen from the two of them before and anyone who thinks they know what they're going to be getting is in for a big surprise." First appearance junkies are hereby alerted that both characters appeared in Geof Darrow's poster in *Spawn #11*: "the one that looks like a bold, tiny art deco robot and the one that looks like a sort of cartoony, Astro Boy character."

Other Legend titles will include Paul Chadwick's award-winning Concrete, to appear in a series of short stories for *Dark Horse Presents* and an all-new mini-series; Art Adams, fresh from *Creature From the Black Lagoon*, will be writing and drawing a series entitled *Monkeyman and O'Brien*, a gorilla & girl buddy book; and Mike Mignola reportedly enjoyed drawing big, lovable monsters in his back-up stories for Ted McKeever's *Metropol*, that he's wants to draw monsters more often, and gets the chance in *Hellboy*, the story of a paranormal investigator which will be partly scripted by John Byrne.

I DIDN'T COME HERE FOR THE PARTY. I CAME HERE FOR YOU. I'VE WATCHED YOU FOR DAYS. YOU'RE EVERYTHING A MAN COULD EVER WANT.
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I SEE A CRAZY CALM. YOU'RE SICK OF RUNNING. YOU'RE READY TO FACE WHAT YOU HAVE TO FACE.
BUT YOU DON'T WANT TO FACE IT ALONE.
NO. I DON'T WANT TO FACE IT ALONE.
LEGEND

Imprint Publisher or What?

"What is it about seven? Frank was laughing about that the other day. He was saying, I promise you, we didn't intend it to be that way." John Dennett laughs, and laughs louder with every comparison to the Image 'seven'.

"The idea of Legend is deceptively simple. It's a sort of club, and the only thing you have to do to get in is to have your work mutually respected by all the people involved. Actually that makes membership sound easy, but it isn't. We've got seven guys who completely respect each others work and enjoy working together, people who consider each other to carry the same sort of standards and professionalism that they enjoy working in.

continued p8

ATOMEKA FOLDS - BLACKBALL EMERGES

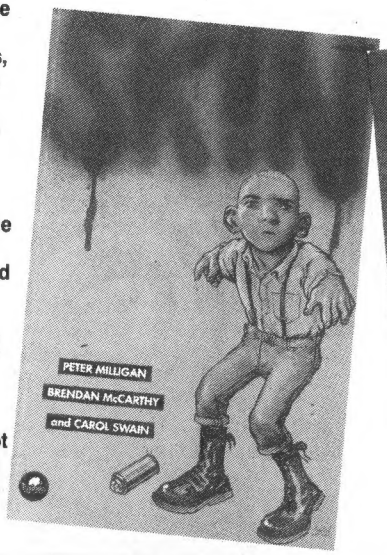
After months of speculation it has been announced officially that Tundra Publishing (UK) Ltd., founded as the British arm of Kevin Eastman's Northampton-based publishing firm, is to fold. Tundra, launched following talks at the San Diego Convention in 1991, was headed by Dave Elliott, who has promptly announced the formation of Blackball Comics.

Tundra had a frustrating two year history, and may, sadly, be better remembered by fans in the future for what they *didn't* publish: the initial announcements from the company listed a Who's Who of British creators and prestige titles, many of which fell by the wayside as economic reality forced the company to streamline. The initial orders on titles such as *Greenhouse Warriors* and *Skidmarks* were disappointing, lacking the name recognition in the USA. A slimmed down line under Elliott's Atomeka imprint, designed to help separate the UK line from that American parent, failed to ignite the masses; with the sale of the parent company to Kitchen Sink earlier this year and the growing belief within the industry that the summer months would not be able to support and sustain the overcrowded market, Atomeka were likely to be amongst the casualties.

In their two years, Atomeka published some remarkable books, amongst them the controversial Milligan/McCarthy/Swain collaboration, *Skin*, the uncompromising story of thalidomide victim Martin Atchison, *Lazarus Churchyard*, the three-part cyberpunk nightmare by Warren Ellis & D'Israeli, and the ultraviolent *White Trash* by Gordon Rennie & Martin Emond; the latter will be collected as a graphic novel or October release and will be the final title.

Other Atomeka titles will almost certainly find homes, some with *Heavy Metal*, still owned by Eastman's Metal Mammoth, others with Kitchen Sink and some possibly with Marvel's Epic or DC's Vertigo.

Elliott has retained the Brixton-based offices for his next venture, Blackball Comics, announcing two titles for December: the *Trencher Christmas Special* by Keith Giffen (see *CW #19*) and a second *Monster Massacre* special with contributions from Giffen, James O'Barr, Kev O'Neill, P. Craig Russell, David Quinn & Hannibal King and a Bisley cover. The anthology title will then become a regular monthly in February, with the return of *Trencher* as a regular title in March.



VENDETTA IN GOTHAM

Judge Dredd returns to Gotham City to settle his score with the Batman in the sequel to the massively popular *Judgement on Gotham*. Written by John Wagner & Alan Grant, the second stand-off between the DC and Fleetway characters is drawn by Cam Kennedy, the 48-page prestige-format volume shipping on November 16 priced $4.95.

Judgement on Gotham has become one of the, if not the, best selling graphic novel in the UK; published originally in December 1991, the Fleetway Editions softback sold 35,000 copies, followed by a 50,000 copy magazine format edition in January 1992. The Mandarin edition, published in September 1992, has pushed total sales over the 100,000 mark. The American edition, published by DC Comics, has sold over 250,000 copies in three printings.

In *Vendetta in Gotham* Dredd takes on Batman for a knock-down, drag-out battle; at the same time, the Ventriloquist and Scarface are on a murder spree, and Dredd's single-minded hate for the vigilante Dark Knight may involve changing history.

LIEFELD LEAVES EXTREME

Following the completion of *Youngblood: Strikefile #3* and his contribution to *Deathmate Red*, Rob Liefeld will be leaving Extreme Studios on an extended sabbatical, "for the foreseeable future" according to editor, Eric Stephenson. His appearance at the San Diego Comic-Con will be his last for 1993, and it is unlikely that he will make any personal appearances in 1994. "Rob will take

TOP THIRTY

1	(1)	**X-Men #26** (Marvel)
2	(4)	**Uncanny X-Men #306** (Marvel)
3	(–)	**Spawn #16** (Image)
4	(6)	**X-Force #28** (Marvel)
5	(3)	**X-Men 2099 #2** (Marvel)
6	(9)	**X-Factor #96** (Marvel)
7	(24)	**Wolverine #75** (Marvel)
8	(10)	**Sandman #55** (DC)
9	(–)	**Excalibur #71** (Marvel)
10	(–)	**Avengers #368** (Marvel)
11	(2)	**Batman #501** (DC)
12	(11)	**Daredevil: Man Without Fear #2** (Marvel)
13	(17)	**Spider-Man 2099 #13** (Marvel)
14	(–)	**Aliens Vs Predator: Deadliest of the Species #2** (Dark Horse)
15	(19)	**Cable #5** (Marvel)
16	(14)	**Detective Comics #668** (DC)
17	(–)	**Venom: The Madness #1** (Marvel)
18	(22)	**Legends of the Dark Knight #54** (DC)
19	(29)	**Hellblazer #71** (DC)
20	(21)	**Batman: Shadow of the Bat #20** (DC)
21	(21)	**Batman: Shadow of the Bat #21** (DC)
22	(28)	**Amazing Spider-Man #383** (Marvel)
23	(–)	**Incredible Hulk #411** (Marvel)
24	(–)	**Sabretooth #4** (Marvel)
25	(–)	**Previews vol 3:#9** (Diamond)
26	(–)	**Stormwatch #5** (Image)
27	(–)	**Aliens: Labyrinth #1** (Dark Horse)
28	(5)	**Superman #83**
29	(–)	**Infinity Crusade #6** (Marvel)
30	(–)	**Spiderman #40** (Marvel)

Top 30 supplied by Titan Distributors

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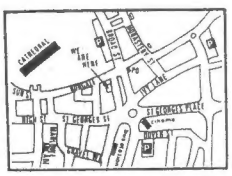

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CONTINUED

some time off from physically working inside the studio," said Stephenson. "He wants to isolate himself from the studio for a while to cut down on some of the distractions that come from dealing with six young artists."

Liefeld had already said much the same thing in a message to fans in *Brigade #2*: "I'm looking to devote all my time to getting the *Youngblood* regular series out in early '94 and...the only way to do that is to go away and focus - which is what I'll be doing for the next twelve months. When *Youngblood* returns it will be as a monthly on-going series."

"In the past there have been a lot of distractions that have prevented Rob from giving his full concentration to *Youngblood*," says Stephenson, who will be co-managing the studio in his absence with Cheri Liefeld and continue the current line of titles which include Liefeld creations *Brigade*, *Bloodstrike* and *Supreme*.

Over the past 18 months Liefeld has produced only a handful of issues of the titles he has been involved in: having produced characters, plot and art for his first Image title, *Youngblood #1*, by issue #4, published almost a year later, he had inking help from Danny Miki. Most of his Extreme Studio creations - *Supreme*, *Brigade*, the more recent *Bloodstrike* and *Youngblood Yearbook* - were the work of assistants, with Liefeld crediting himself mostly as creator and co-plotter. Only one episode of 'Bloodwulf' has appeared (in *Darker Image*) and the mooted *Doom's IV* series, solicited up to issue #4 already, is to be resolicited from #1 in November.

According to an Extreme Studio press-release, Liefeld will continue to pursue licensing deals and other projects, and will still be involved with the future and direction of Image.

US NEWSBRIEF

AARDVARK-VANAHEIM

'Mothers and Daughters Book Three' begins in *Cerebus the Aardvark #175* wherein novelist and illustrator Viktor Reid is juggling three new projects, one of which is likely to lose him some friends.

AXIS

Axis Comics is the new imprint for *Tribe* by Todd Johnson & Larry Stroman, confusingly soliciting issue #4 for publication in October when orders for #s 2 and 3 have been cancelled by distributors. Ask them about it at UKCAC.

CALIBER PRESS

Two volumes collecting *Baker Street* by Guy *(Sandman Mystery Theatre)* Davis are to be published in October, entitled *Honour Among Punks* and *Children of the Night*, both in squarebound trade paperback format, each collecting 5 issues and priced $14.95.

CONTINUITY

With 'The Rise of Magic' almost upon us, most Continuity titles have been taken over by the foil-embossed demon, including *Armor #7*, *Crazyman #4*, *Hybrids #1* (an all-new Hybrids), *Samuree #4*, *Megalith #7*, *Ms Mystic #4* and *Valeria, the She Bat #6*. Classic Games are soliciting Rise of Magic trading cards.

DARK HORSE

Tom Veitch pens a new 5-issue *Star Wars* series set before the rise of the Empire in *Tales of the Jedi #1*, drawn by Chris Gossett & Mike Barreiro: in the days of the newly formed Republic, policed by the Jedi Knights, young Jedi-in-training, Ulic Quel-Droma, prepares to face his first great test, which he may not survive.

Mike Kaluta has revived the 1930s pulp hero, The Shadow with art by Joel Goss & Gary Gianni, the first in the 4-issue *In the Coils of Leviathan* the caped vigilante facing a supernatural monstrosity which attacks its victims through the sewers of New York.

The first post-Comics Greatest World title is *Vortex #1*, written by John Ostrander with art by Damon Willis & Joe Rubinstein, the most explosive, mysterious and powerful hero of them all. This comes with a prism-stamped foil logo cover.

Basil Wolverton's Fantastic Fables says it all really: a hilarious, macabre, slapstick collection of tales by Basil Wolverton.

Dark Horse begin a regular schedule of Manga with *Appleseed Book 4* collecting 'The Promethean Balance', the series (by Masamune Shirow) involving the ESWAT operatives Deunan and her robot lover, Briareos, as they struggle against criminals, terrorists, and a growing rebellion within the massive city they protect.

Dead in the West is created by Joe R. Lansdale, currently writing

Jonah Hex for Vertigo, written by Neal Barrett Jr. and drawn by Jack Jackson, set in Mud Creek, Texas, c1876 where a preacher and a young boy square off against the living dead.

Dark Horse Presents #78 has the first in an occasional series of adaptations by Charles Vess of famous ballads, the first adapted by Jane Yolen.

Rick Geary chronicles the further adventures of Blanche, the plucky heroine of *Blanche Goes to New York*, her latest travels taking her to tinsel town in *Blanche Goes to Hollywood*.

DEFIANT

October has the first issue of *Dark Dominion* by Jim Shooter, marking the return of Steve Ditko to superheroes. To the real world, Michael Alexander is an ageing eccentric, but the denizens of the Quantum Substratum he's a mighty power to be feared. He's out to fight the demons of the id. Good job too.

The River Group will be releasing the *Plasm* associated *Splatterbowl I Preview Card Set. Plasm*...sorry, *Warriors of Plasm* hits #3 in October.

ECLIPSE

The second volume of *Clive Barker Illustrator: The Art of Clive Barker* is released in hardcover at $39.95, and softcover at $19.95, examining paintings, drawings and sketches that made up Clive's one-man show in New York's Bess Cutler Gallery, plus a preview of material from his upcoming second show.

IMAGE

The prolific Various Artists draws *The Art of Homage Studios*, a 48-page swimsuit special and 'how to draw the Homage way', plus Homage Studio facts. Various is aided and abetted by Jim Lee, Marc Silvestri, Whilce Portactio, Scott Williams and others.

Marc Silvestri's back with the ongoing *Cyberforce #1*, written by brother Eric, the first issue crossing over with WildC.A.T.S.

And *WildC.A.T.S. #5* is the start of a new, ongoing series, resolicited for October, wherein the WildC.A.T.S. discover that the Cabal may have an inside man at Cyberdata.

Vanguard #1 was previewed in

Savage Dragon, and now has his own ongoing series, the first issue featuring a back-up story by Erik Larsen revealing Vanguard's first appearance.

INNOVATION

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LEGEND

continued from Page 4

"There's not going to be any more Legend members for some time. Frank said that it would be at least two more years before they would even consider more; seven is more than a handful and it would be impossible to decide who to say yes to and who to say no to. As Frank said, even if Alan Moore called up and said 'I've got a great new series planned with Brian Bolland', however excruciating it might be, he'd still say 'Come back in two years and see where we're at'.

"Legend is incorporated, I guess, but its not a company, its not a publisher, its not even a group ownership: its an imprint, sort of a seal of good housekeeping. So if you pick up a book by John Byrne it will have the Legend imprint on it if its something that he created, that he works on himself.

"And if you know nothing about comics and you want to be assured of picking up something of the same quality, you find another comic with the Legend imprint, by Art Adams say. It's a way of letting people know that you can follow one little icon on the cover of a book and you know that you're going to get good stuff wherever you go.

"All the guys have decided to publish through Dark Horse, but each book is individually owned by the creators and not somehow owned collectively by Legend. As I understand it, the creators can go elsewhere and take the Legend imprint with them. It's something they can carry around with them to indicate an affiliation - the real affiliation being quality.

"I suppose there's a slight tip of the hat to the market place, that people seem to need some sort of signpost in a market that's growing this fast; you need a little something to lift books out.

"It's going to be a pretty big deal, I think."

Comic World presents a unique chance to preview the forthcoming Legend titles; the following pages were published in Dark Horse's San Diego Convention comic, featuring (clockwise from below left): Geof Darrow, Dave Gibbons, Art Adams, John Byrne, Mike Mignola, & (right) Paul Chadwick and Frank Miller. Art © respective creators.

Concrete
AMAZONIS, BRAZIL, AT THE CONFLUENCE OF THE RIO NEGRO AND THE AMAZON.
CONCRETE, MAUREEN, AND LARRY ARE ON A BOAT TOUR.
IT IS THEIR LAST FULL DAY ON THE RIVER.
A WHAT TREE?
KAPOC.
BIG.
TO SAY THE LEAST.
BACK TO THE RIVER, EVERYONE!
WATCH FOR SNAKES!
Story & Art ©1993 PAUL CHADWICK
Lettering: BILL SPICER
STEEL RAIN
WHAT'S THE MATTER, MAUREEN?
OH... JUST THAT IF WE EVER COME BACK HERE, THAT TREE WILL BE GONE.
PABLO SAYS THIS WHOLE AREA'S BEING LOGGED.
EVEN THE KAPOC?
YUP.
OF COURSE, IT'S THE HABITAT'S DESTRUCTION MORE THAN THE TREE THAT WE SHOULD MOURN.
BUT WHAT A TREE!
LOOK, THERE THEY ARE!
FRANK MILLER'S
SIN CITY
"THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS RIGHT"
SHE SHIVERS IN THE WIND, LIKE THE LAST LEAF ON A DYING TREE.
I LET HER HEAR MY FOOTSTEPS. SHE ONLY GOES STIFF FOR A MOMENT.
CARE FOR A SMOKE?
SURE. I'LL TAKE ONE.
ARE YOU AS BORED BY THAT CROWD BACK THERE AS I AM?

US NEWSBRIEF
CONTINUED

plucks the outcasts and vermin from a million different planets to inhabit a world of his own design: Eden, where chaos reigns supreme.

Black Cat Crossing is a 96-page softcover collection of stories by Richard Sala, with an 8-page colour section and painted cover.

The Upturned Stone is a 64-page graphic novella by Scott Hampton, an eerie horror story in which four boys discover the grave of a murdered boy and invoke a phantom yearning for vengeance.

MALIBU

Barry Windsor-Smith's *Rune* runs through all eleven of the Ultraverse titles this month - take a deep breath - *Exiles #3*, *Firearm #2*, *Freex #4*, *Hardcase #5*, *Mantra #4*, *The Night Man #1*, *Prime #5*, *Prototype #3*, *Sludge #1*, *The Solution #2* and *The Strangers #5*. Each will contain a coupon through which you can get *Rune #0*.

The Genesis crossover runs through *Dinosaurs For Hire #9*, *Ex-Mutants #12* and *Protectors #14*, with elements of the story effecting the Protectors titles *The Ferret #6*, *Gravestone #4* and *Man Of War #7*. The resolution of the story creates a new character, WidowMaker, whose own title will debut in November.

Dead Clown #1 is a new 3-part series by Chris Ulm, Joel Thomas & Bobby Rae featuring Ghastly the Dead Clown, whose battlecry is 'Super-heroes must die!' following the death of Jojo, the comic strip clown who doesn't quite die the way Petro Global Entertainment want him to. Petro Global hire Force America to bring him in.

TOPPS

Topps match two historical figures in *Dracula Vs Zorro* by Don McGregor, Tom Yeates & Rick Magyar, a two-issue series which will be followed in January by an ongoing *Zorro* monthly.

HER BLOOD SPURTING FASTER, FLOWING SO HEAVILY IT OVERFLOWS HIS CANINE TEETH--
--STAINS HIS LIPS AND SWEEPS IN RED ACCUSATION ACROSS HIS TONGUE.

VALIANT

Harbinger #25 is a double-sized issue, the conclusion of the 'Twilight of the Eighth Day' storyline in which Sting and Toyo

US NEWSBRIEF CONTINUED

meet for a final confrontation. The story sets up a new direction for the title.

Solar, Man of the Atom #29 is available in glorious Valiant Vision, a sort of 3-D effect without the green and red blurred pages. Ah, but to get the images leaping from the page you need to buy the *Valiant Vision Starter Kit* at a rip-off $2.95 for a pair of VV glasses and an 8-page comic, plus a Joe Quesada poster.

Turok, Dinosaur Hunter #7 has a new creative one-man team in Tim Truman for the beginning of a three issue story.

BRITISH NEWS

TITAN AND DIAMOND MERGE

Following fifteen months of negotiations and hurdles, Titan Distributors Ltd. finally and officially merged with Diamond Comic Distributors Inc. The merger had been announced at last years UKCAC, but various complications had arisen; a decision by the Office of Fair Trading meant that the purchase would not be referred to the Monopolies & Mergers Commission, and contracts drawn up a year ago were signed on 28 July.

Titan, with sixteen years as the leading distributor of comics in the UK, will remain essentially unchanged, Mike Lake claiming that customer services will be improved with the strength and organisation of Diamond. Steve Geppi, President and CEO of Diamond, said "Over time, the operations of Titan and Diamond UK will merge. We intend to proceed slowly and carefully with the merger to ensure that our new company retains the two most important assets of both Diamond and Titan: all of our knowledgeable and caring employees, and the valued customers they serve."

Warehouses for both Titan and Diamond will remain open whilst the company explores various distribution strategies, and the only immediate change will be a merging of Titan's order forms for retailers. Geppi also stressed that "we have absolutely no plans to raise our prices."

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DARK HORSE

Manga Mania #5 is a gaming special looking at the relationship between manga, anime and games, with a Streetfighter II cover and an Akira poster. The various strip continue through most of Dark Horse's titles in September, with 'Batman Vs Predator' concluding in *Total Carnage #7*, and 'Backsplash' concluding in *Aliens #16*. *Dracula* ends with issue 9, but heralds exciting news which will be announced towards the end of the year.

ELLIOTT COMICS

Glen Dakin & Phil Elliott will release *Greenhouse Warriors #3* in October, this issue marking the start of a new tale involving killer skulls, vats of acid, and some cuddling behind the garden shed.

FLEETWAY

Prog 852 launches the Autumn Attack of *2000AD* with four new stories led by 'Slaine: Demon Killer' by Pat Mills & Glenn Fabry (see interview), plus 'Robo-Hunter: Winnigan's Fake' by Pete Hogan & Rian Hughes, returning Sam Slade to basics, 'Tyranny Rex: Deus Ex Machina' by John Smith & Mark Buckingham (taken over by John Marshal with part 5) and 'The Mean Arena' by Alan McKenzie & Anthony Williams, described as "Gladiators and WWF taken to a ludicrous degree". The Dredd adventure, 'Inferno' ends in #853 to make way for 'Wargames',

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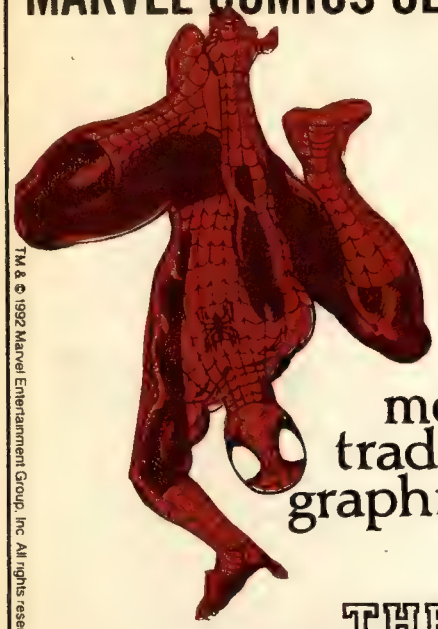

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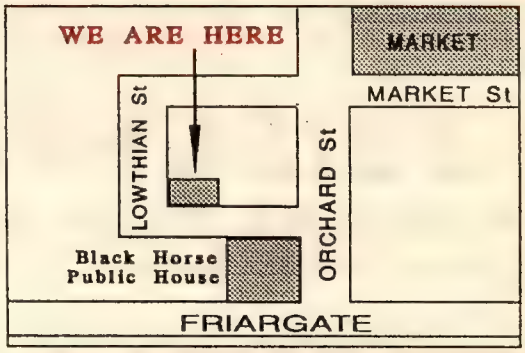

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BRITISH NEWS CONTINUED

introducing the chinese judges of Sino-Cit. Replacing Robo-Hunter in Prog 855 will be 'Strontium Dogs' featuring Feral & Gronk's quest to find Johnny Alpha's killers.

The line-up for this year's *2000AD Yearbook* includes Judge Dredd by Wagner & Burns, Tharg by Bradbury, Tyranny Rex by Smith & Marshal, Luke Kirby by McKenzie & Ridgway, Robo-Hunter by Hogan & Hughes, The Clown by Goldkind & Staples, Young Dave by Morrison, Millar & Parkhouse, plus reprints of D.R. & Quinch and Ro-Busters, all in a double-gatefold cover by Mick Austin.

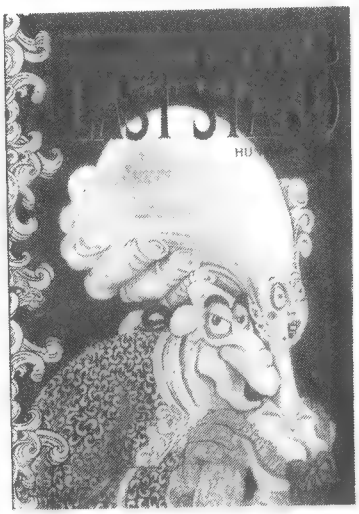
The *Judge Dredd Yearbook* has Mean Machine by Wagner & McMahon, Dredd by Grant & Ormston, Judge Hershey by Robbie Morrison & Peart, Armitage by Stone & Russell Fox, a Devlin Waugh text story by Smith and the ubiquitous double-gatefold cover by Mark Wilkinson. Both yearbooks are priced £5.95.

In the regular fortnightly, #37 has a stunning Judge Anderson poster which has Cassie on one side and a six page adventure on the other, an epilogue to the recent 'Childhood's End', by Mark Wilkinson; this issue also sees the debut of Hondo City judges in 'Shimura' by Robbie Morrison & Frank Quitely, 'Return of the Taxidermist' by Wagner & Gibson, with Jake Sardini out of retirement to contest the Mega-Olympics, 'Mechanismo: Body Count' by Wagner & Manuel Benet, and a Judge Hershey tale, 'The Harlequin's Dance' by Igor Goldkind & Kevin Cullen. The free gifts continue in #38 with a 1994 Calendar poster with art by Chris Halls and John McCrea.

The Complete Judge Dredd #21 begins the classic 'Judge Death Lives' by Brian Bolland and features a new Death cover by Dean Ormston.

KNOCKABOUT

Knockabout's latest Crack Editions graphic novel is the all-new *Casanova's Last Stand* by Hunt Emerson, a hilarious telling of the life of one of history's greatest lovers as the 73-year-old plans one last grand seduction. As you can imagine, this is adults only and well worth the £6.99 price.



MARVEL

Marvel launch no less than nine new titles in November. Seven are mini-series: *Warhide* (4-issues) by writing team David Leach & Jeremy Banx and artist Carlos de Miguel Bonilla; *Ripwire* (4-issues) by Craig Houston & Stuart Jennett; *Removal Man Vs Motormouth* (2-issues) by Glenn Dakin & Pedro Espinosa; *Death Metal* (4-issues) by Simon Furman & John Royle; *Death Wreck* (4-issues) by Craig Houston & Stewart Johnson; *Officer Outbody* (4-issues) by Glenn Dakin & Ross Dearsley.

Doctor Who: Age of Chaos (4-issues) is by sixth Doctor Colin Baker with artwork by the legendary John Burns who pitch the anniversary-celebrating time traveller against dinosaurs and barbarians as he embarks on a quest to fulfil an old prophesy and find his old companion, Perl.

Death's Head II Gold is a new gold-covered quarterly 48-pager written and drawn by Liam Sharp (see interview this issue).

And *Marvel Frontier Comics Unlimited* debuts as a quarterly of self-contained stories drawn from the Frontier line. The first issue has

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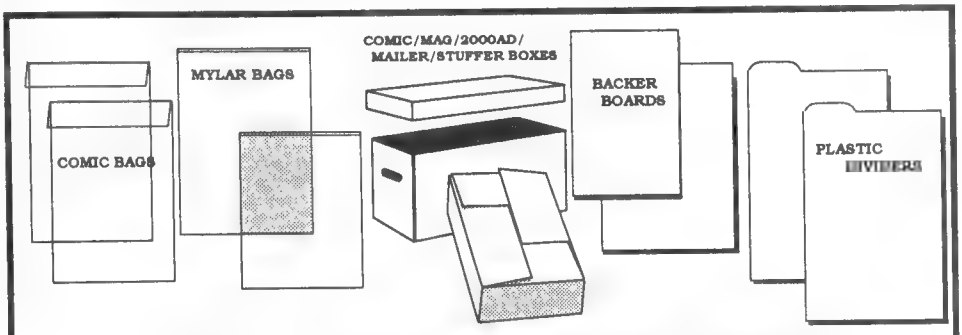

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a cover by Liam Sharp, plus stories featuring 'Bloodseed' by Neary & Sharp, 'Children of the Voyager' by Abadzis & Johnson, 'Dances With Demons' by Jowett & Adlard, 'Immortalis' by Vince & Buckingham, and the debuts of 'Fallen Angel' by Vince & Matt Brooker and 'Evil Eye' written & drawn by David Hine.

MONOLITH

Monolith Publishing are a new name, their first title, *Odyssey*, described by writer/artist as "based on Greek Myths, but partly takes place around a human girl exploring the Otherworld where Gods, Goddesses and heroes live. The hero is Dante, a lover, warrior and wanderer who is killed, but resurrected for part one of the regular series. There are plenty of subplots, unpredictable, untypical. Ten of the forty b/w pages are half-tones from painted artwork." *Odyssey* is due in September, priced £1.95.

TITAN

Titan have *The Collected Slaine* by Pat Mills and various artists due September 16, priced £8.99, alongside a graphic novel reprinting of the Topps movie adaptation, *Jurassic Park* by Simonson, Kane & Perez, priced £5.99 and the latest Sandman, *A Game of You* by Neil Gaiman, priced £9.99. Two weeks later, the Dennis O'Neil, Trevor von Eeden & Russell Braun story *Batman: Venom* ships, priced £6.50 - continuity buffs may want this to see where Bane got his strength from.

BOXTREE

Jon Courtenay Grimwood has been appointed consultant editor at Boxtree with particular responsibility for cult sf, Anime and Manga. He'll be responsible for graphic novels, non-fiction fact books and novelisations, and is looking for anyone with strong commercial ideas in these areas.

COMPAL

Malcolm Phillips of Comic Book Auctions Ltd. recently reported the sale of a fine *Amazing Spider-Man #1* for £1,870, and sales of various key Silver Age titles sold for up to 40% above estimate; that and other signs of a revival in the back issues market has prompted him to list no less than seven #1s in the current September catalogue, including *Fantastic Four, Green Lantern, X-Men, Daredevil, Silver Surfer, Sub-Mariner* and *Iron Man & Sub-Mariner*, plus other Silver Age gems *Batman #100, Showcase #34* (1st Silver Age Atom) and a complete run of *Sub-Mariner #1-72*. The showcase issue of the sale, however, must be *Amazing Fantasy #15* with the first appearance of Spider-Man, whilst the most intriguing items are a range of Fiction House titles from the 1950s, including *Sheena Queen of the Jungle, Ka'a'nga Comics, Firehair Comics* and *Longbow*. The current catalogue closes 22 September, and is available free on 071 586 3007.

INFERNO

The computer game rather than the latest Dredd epic. Sean Phillips is the artist of a 32-page comic available with the Ocean PC game released in October, a space flight simulator. The comic was co-written by Shaun Hollywood, the games visual designer, and, according to Sean, the model for DC's current *Kid Eternity*.

MARVEL NEWS

SIEGE OF DARKNESS

"Due to their incredible success, the Midnight Sons are breaking away from the Marvel mainstream to form their own sub-Universe!" screams a Marvel press-release, although British retailers at least have found the titles less than successful. It's good to see the 'Because you demanded it' ad hype hasn't died, customer apathy or not *(Get on with it, cynic - Ed)*.

Marvelrelaunchtheserieswith new covers, a new logo, and a 17-part crossover which begins in *Nightstalkers #14* and continues through *Ghost Rider #44-45, Darkhold #15-16, Nightstalkers #15, Spirits of Vengeance #17-18, Dr. Strange #60-61, Marvel Comics Presents #143-146, Spectacular*

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Spider-Man #207-208 and *Silver Sable #19*. Zarathos returns, as do Lilith and the Lilin, a Midnight Son will die - but that hasn't stopped some of the already dead ones - and there's betrayal and terrifying consequences aplenty. *Dr. Strange* will join the line, and there's a special *Ghost Rider and the Midnight Sons* magazine shipping October 5.

The Siege has its own card system - you buy three cards listing six, six and five titles for the price of the issues (i.e. card #1 costs 6 x $1.75 = $10.50, or UK equivalent), and on return of the three cards to your retailer, Marvel will supply an uncut card sheet.

A new Midnight Sons title is *Blaze*, a 4-issue series by Howard Mackie & Ron Wagner, #1 shipping October 19. Sporting a new look, new powers and a new set of wheels, Blaze seeks out his kidnapped family, fighting off supernatural menaces at every turn.

ROUND-UP

The raging cajun, *Gambit*, gets his own 4-issue mini-series, the first issue in embossed, debossed and gold-foil. Howard Mackie writes the story of Gambit's return to New Orleons with his foster brother, who is killed before his eyes. Lee Weeks & Klaus Janson provide the artwork.

CliveBarker's*Pinhead*getshis own ongoing series, written by Dan Chichester and drawn by Dario Carrasco with a foil-enhanced cover by Kelley Jones. And Marvel are pinning (groan) more hopes on Barker with a second new series, *The Harrowers*, created for the Epic series *Hellraiser*, written by the Zinc Ink team with artwork by Gene Colan, ex-of the classic *Tomb of Dracula*.

Another horror title is *Hellhound*, a 4-issue series from Epic written by John Miller with art by Floyd Hughes in which John Roberts sells his soul to the devil and discovers that being Satan's messenger is not such a bargain.

More horror, this time of the real kind: *Wolverine in Global Jeopardy* is a one-shot special produced in association with the World Wildlife Fund, available in the US direct market only. 10% of the cover price goes to WWF (no, not *that* WWF), so get a friend over in the States to order you a copy so that the money goes to the right people. The 32-pages contain 16 of story, written by Peter David, and 16 by wildlife photographer Gerry Ellis with accompanying text highlighting endangered wildlife.

KingArthurandtheKnightsof Justice is a new 3-part mini-series written by Mike Lackey and drawn by Keith Wilson & Marie Severin, a modern retelling of the Arthur Pendragon legend based around the new animated cartoon version.

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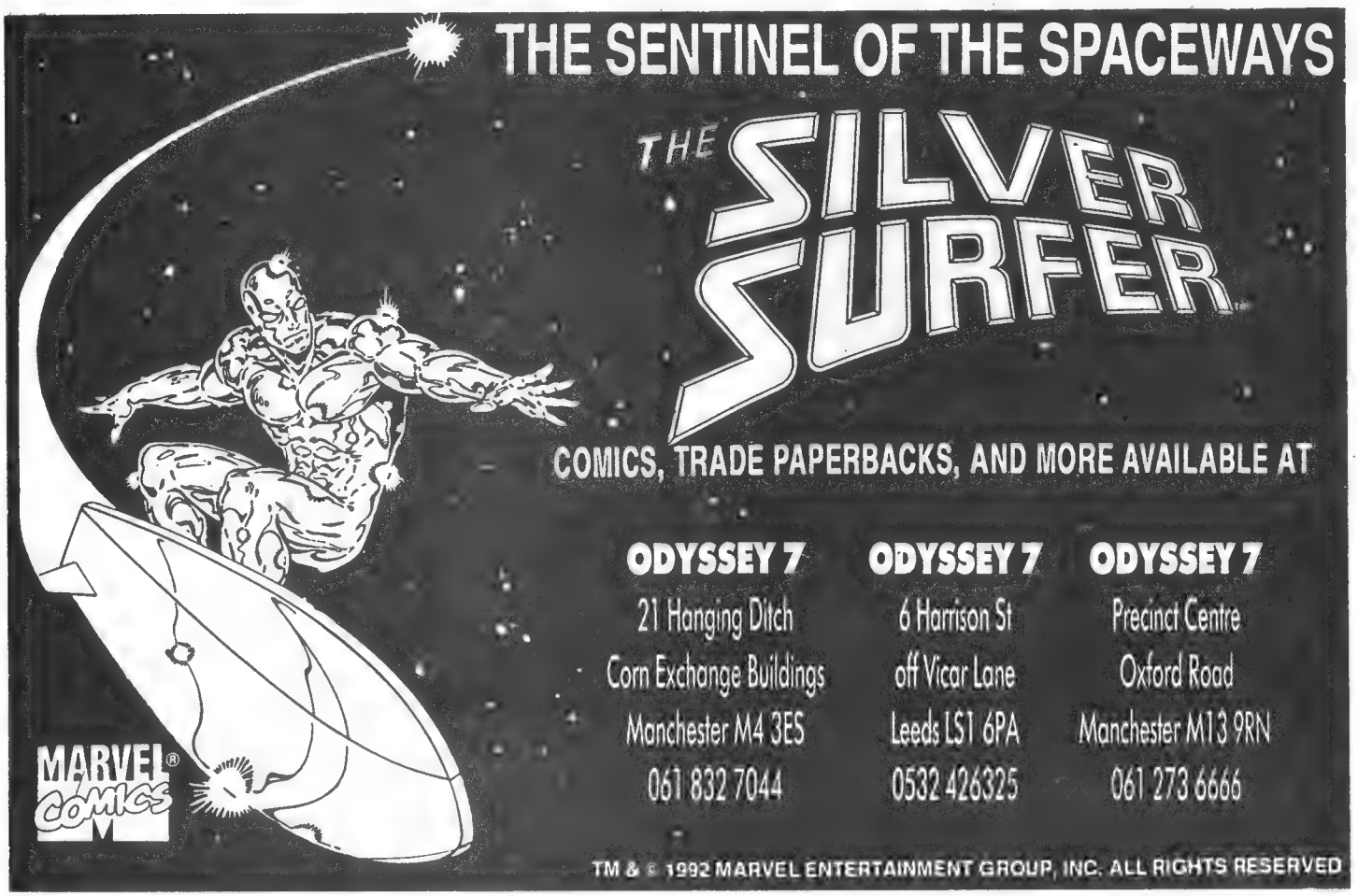

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Take a peek into Captain America's new headquarters in *Captain America #422*, but watch out for new villain, Sidewinder...Venom guests in *Daredevil #323*...*Marvel Masterworks #25* is a hardcover reprinting of *Fantastic Four #41-50*, plus *FF Annual #3*...*Monster Menace* is a 4-issue series reprinting old horror stories by Stan Lee, Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko; aaagh! It's 'Tim Boo Baa'...and there are more weird reprints in *Curse of the Weird* which contains pre-code horrors and *Book of the Dead* which reprints 1970s stories...the Six Pack guest star in *Nomad #20*...*Sachs & Violens #2* has a bound-in trading card, as do all the Heavy Hitter titles from Epic this month...*She-Hulk* will be getting a new creative team with #59...Sandstorm is a lethal new foe introduced in *Web of Spider-Man #107*...Dark Horse International's Cefn Ridout writes the two-part Scarlet Witch adventure 'Techno Hell' for *Marvel Comics Presents #143-144*...*Punisher War Zone #22* may conclude the 'DX' storyline, but it prequels next month's Punisher 10-part crossover, 'Suicide Run'...*Ravage 2099 #13* also prequels a 2099 crossover beginning in December...*Conan #275* is the final issue, but expect a new title in the wake of the US Conan animated series...and Conan editor Richard Ashford takes on the writing chores of *Excalibur* with issue #72...Paul Pelletier takes over the pencils on *Incredible Hulk #412* but Gary Frank will return...*Mort the Dead Teenager* is a 4-issue series by Larry Hama & Gary Hallgren which starts with the death of Mort Graves when his car hits a speeding train...Jae Lee is the artist for *Spider-Man #41*, first part of a three-issue series...*X-Men Vs Dracula* reprints *X-Men Annual #6* with art by Bill Sienkiewicz, the first of a 4-part series...*Captain America: Deathlok Lives* reprints *CA #286-288* in a 64-page bookshelf format...*New Warriors #42* leads into a soon to arrive ongoing *Nova* monthly...Marvel are petitioning newspapers to carry the Spider-Man strip, which will cross-over into a special Spider-Man limited series, starting December 6. It'll be the same story in both newspapers and comic, but to get the full story you need both...

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DC NEWS

SHADOW WAR

The Second Wave of Milestone titles are launched with an explosive crossover series which will take in all the Milestone titles and introduce *Xombi* and *Shadow Cabinet*.

The Shadow Cabinet are a secret organisation of superpowered heroes pledged to uphold the best in humanity led by the enigmatic Dharma; when a rogue faction calling themselves the Star Chamber learns of a devastating biochemical weapon, the race is on seize control and the Shadow War begins. The Shadow Cabinet recruit Hardware, Icon, Static and Blood Syndicate, and the crossover reveals the secrets behind the Big Bang which created the heroes; Xombi is a bio-chemist turned hero who injects himself with nanomachines which repair his body, both new titles introduced in special issue #0s.

Shadow War runs through *Hardware #11* (shipping November 16), *Icon #9* (November 23), *Xombi #0* (November 23), *Blood Syndicate #10* (November 30, a 48-page special), *Static #8* (December 7) and *Shadow Cabinet #0* (December 7), all featuring covers by Walt Simonson.

ROUND-UP

DC have signed up Chris Claremont for a new creator-owned project to be published in 1994, an ongoing monthly entitled *Sovereign 7*. The seven characters of the title are survivors of extra-dimensional worlds who have become marooned on Earth, chased by a villain so powerful that she threatens to destroy all existence. The story will be pencilled by Dwayne Turner, currently on Marvel's *Wolverine* and the 'Hulk 2099' story in *Marvel 2099 Unlimited*. Claremont's current work includes the Aliens/Predator series *The Deadliest of the Species* and *Renegade* for Dark Horse, and a forthcoming series from Defiant.

Neil Gaiman's Deathstars in *Death Gallery*, a collection of original pin-ups by Chris Bachalo, Brian Bolland, Mark Buckingham, Marc Hempel, Michael Kaluta, Dave McKean, P. Craig Russell, Jill Karla Schwarz, Jeff Smith, Jill Thompson, Charles Vess, Gahan Wilson, Michael Zulli and others. Ships November 23, followed a week later by *Death: The High Cost of Living* by Neil Gaiman, Chris Bachelo & Mark Buckingham, a hardcover collection of the popular mini-series, priced $19.95.

The new year sees a new series of *Showcase '94*, #1 (shipping November 30) featuring the first part of a James Robinson & Christian Alamy Joker story drawing on events in 'Knightfall'. Backup stories in the new series will draw on characters from DC annuals crossover, 'Bloodlines', the first featuring Gunfire from the *Deathstroke Annual*.

Batman: The Collected Adventures reprints the first seven issues of the highly popular series based on *Batman: The Animated Series*. Shipping November 2, the 144-page volume is priced $5.95 and has a wraparound cover by Ty Templeton.

Vertigo crossovers: 'The Children's Crusade' continues events from *Swamp Thing Annual #7*, running through *Doom Patrol Annual #2*, *Arcana Annual #1*, and concluding in *The Children's Crusade #2*. And *Black Orchid #5* begins a story concluded in *Swamp Thing #139*, both titles featuring the work of Dick Foreman and penciller Rebecca Guay.

Action Comics #695 is a special with a multilevel foil-embossed cover co-starring Lobo and a powerful new villain, Cauldron, unleashed by Project Cadmus. The issue comes in two formats, a $2.50 collector's edition with enhancements and a $1.50 standard edition with a different Jackson Guice cover.

Gary Erskine is the guest artist on *Chain Gang War #7*...*Shade the Changing Man #43* guest stars John Constantine...*Wonder Woman #82* reveals the origin of her nemesis, Ares Buchanan...*Green Lantern #49* leads into next month's landmark issue, and sees the appointment of a new leader to the Green Lantern Corps...Steven Lieber is the guest penciller of *Hawkman #5*...Big changes are in store for the *Legion of Super-Heroes*, beginning in #53...Peter David is the guest writer of *Justice League Task Force #7-8*...Guy Gardner will be adopting a new superheroic name next month, but in *Guy Gardner #16* he's fighting his brother, long-thought dead...

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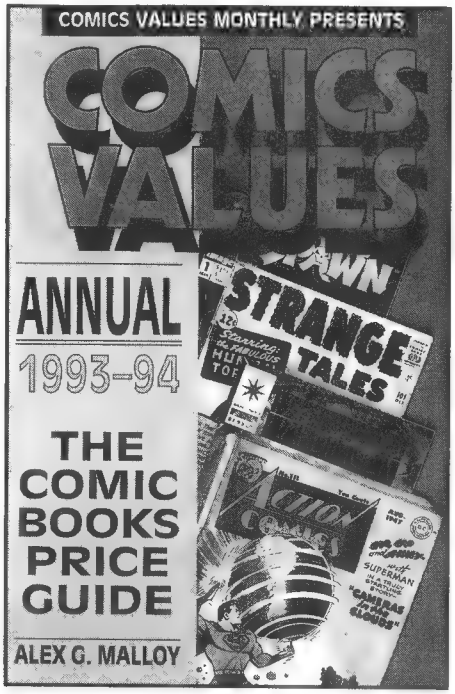

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DARK GUARDIAN

I HAD SEEN THE BIG HERBIVORES, AND RECOGNISED THEIR SPINE WHEN I FOUND THE TENT
I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THAT IF SUCH BEASTS STILL EXISTED, THEIR PREDATORS WOULD NOT BE FAR BEHIND
BANGS. DON'T MOVE A MUSCLE.
SHARKSKIN
GET AWAY!
KA-BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!

▲ Kev Walker

▲ Carlos Pacheco

Cheerfully, Dan Abnett admits he's probably gone mad. "I have no social life, seldom sleep..." In the time it takes him to answer my questions he could have knocked off a quick mini-series, or that's the way it seems sometimes.

"I keep ridiculously busy," he laughs. "About this time last year I didn't know how I could fit in everything I was doing, but now I'm doing twice as much. The reason I keep so busy is because I enjoy doing it."

I KEEP RIDICULOUSLY BUSY

Last summer his schedule included the then newly relaunched *Knights of Pendragon II* in collaboration with John Tomlinson, and a newly found gig at *The Punisher* which he continues to write in collaboration with Andy Lanning. Equally popular is his other regular monthly title, *Death's Head II*; add spin-offs like *The MyS-TECH Wars* and the *Death 3* mini-series and you can understand why the last year has slipped away faster than a front seat at a Jurassic Park showing.

The next few months are going to be just as busy, beginning with the new take on the West Coast Avengers. Hot on the tail of the *West Coast Avengers #100*, the death of a major player, the 30th anniversary celebrations and the 'Bloodties' cross-over with the X-Men, the WCA ends an era in November with the publication of *#102*, to be followed by a new Abnett/Lanning era. "We've been given the task of revamping the team and turning it into something completely new. Unless they change the title again, the new book will be called *Force Works*, which is as deliberate move away from traditional names like the Avengers.

"There will be some new characters and we've several major Marvel Universe characters to play with, like Iron Man, and several others who have been around for some time but nothing has been done with them, particularly – Scarlet Witch, USAgent and Spider-Woman, who were born in the shadow of other characters. They'll be given identities of their own above and beyond what has been done before.

"There's a whole range of limited series' spotlighting all the different members of what was the West Coast Avengers. Andy and I are doing *Scarlet Witch* with John Higgins. It was through that we were offered *Force Works*.

"We have real hopes for the new series. It should be very appealing to the legions of fans who enjoy the solid, continuity superheroes based in the Marvel Universe. It really will progress several of the characters in an exciting direction. The other thing is that we've got an excellent artist called Tom Tenney: he's a newcomer, a Texan, and he's brimming over with enthusiasm."

Enthusiasm is something that Dan himself is full of. We talked just before the announcement of Atomeka's collapse and, at the time, it looked like two long awaited stories were likely to come out in January, namely *Pale Horses* and the *Lords of Misrule* series. "They were put back because this summer is just too busy. I must admit I've been disheartened by the delay." It won't be anything to the trauma of cancellation. One planned tale at least should go ahead (and, may we be so bold as to suggest that Epic ought to be looking at the others?):

"I got *Carnosaur Carnage* through this morning which has a story by me and Kev Walker, which looks very nice indeed. It was originally meant to be just a short story, but someone saw it, loved the pages, and was so enthusiastic – and with a European's sensibilities, assumed that there was an album's worth of material. So what you read in *Carnosaur Carnage*, whilst being a self-contained story, is also the first chapter of a graphic novel, called *Fargo*, that will be coming out next year from *Heavy Metal*. It's basically cowboys and dinosaurs..."

I'm sure we'll hear news of Abnett's other Atomeka projects soon, including the historical graphic novel about the legendary father of Arthur Pendragon, *Uther, the Half-Dead King*, with artwork by Bo Hampton.

Which neatly links back to Marvel UK where *Knights of Pendragon II* has just finished a creditable 15 issue run leaving Dan time for two further mini-series': the four issue *Gunrunner* with Andy Lanning, and *Ten Sec*, both due out later this year. In the meantime, his latest title to hit the shelves was *Dark Guard*, which team's up the core of Marvel UK's superheroes, Death's Head II, Dark Angel, Motormouth, Killpower, Albion from Pendragon, Stacy and Colonel Liger from Warheads, gathered together by The Time Guardian into a group.

Its a title Dan is particularly happy with, in one sense, miffed in another: "Unfortunately I think its been lost in the welter of other stuff Marvel UK are putting out, especially the Frontier Comics which were being promoted in the same month. It just disappeared from view which I'm disappointed with because I thought it was one of my best pieces of work. I was really pleased with what I'd done with it – again, taken things one pace beyond. It has a fantastic artist, a Spaniard called Carlos Pacheco who is just brilliant. He can knock the spots off of just about everybody you can think of and deserves to be seen. Rather than it being hyped, I hope that people will look at the comic and think 'This is good'."

***Dark Guard* © Marvel Comics**

***Hadrosaurs* © Dan Abnett/Kev Walker**

The Pleece Tapes

They are the comic world's equivalent of Sam'n'Eric from Lord of the Flies. People often assume the two-headed duo of Gary and Warren Pleece are twins, less for any physical resemblance, than for the fact that they speak in the same, barely-audible whisper; they finish each others sentences. They're not, of course. They've been publishing comics in one form or another for five years, and they've never been quite sure why. Their self-published 'zine, Velocity, could not be further from the mainstream: short, very English stories, with Warren's dark, moody artwork providing the perfect foil for Gary's dry, melancholic wit. It's a long way from there to Vertigo (for whom Warren has just completed the four-part mini-series, Skin Graft). They're more passionate about footie and were once the next big thing in rock music: four years ago Suede, fronted by the now sadly ubiquitous androgyne, Brett Anderson, were playing support to their band Eusabio.

Our man visiting Brighton took them to the local Chinese Restaurant to find out why two otherwise sensible and sane lads were still doing comics.

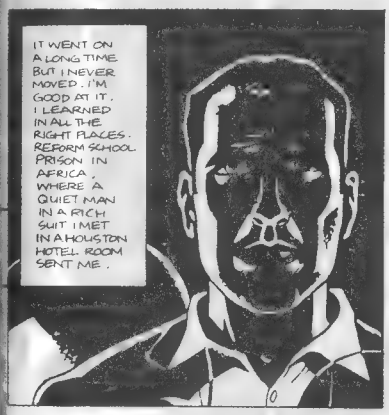
Warren: We get free dinners out of it.
Gary: Screwing gullible editors, really.
CW: How many dinners have you had so far?
Warren: I think this is the second one.
CW: So it's not been much of a success, then . . . ? Seriously, though, if you weren't comics fans to begin with, there has to be some reason why you've been so persistent?
Warren: This is something we were asked all the time in the early days. Basically, it comes down to, I was quite good at drawing; Gary could write and we put the two together one day. . . .
Gary: . . . and came up with *Velocity*. . . .
CW: But, you (Gary) could have gone off and written novels and Warren could have done art and design. . . .
Gary: Our attention span was too short, really. . . .
Warren: You can't say that about comics! It takes so long . . . well, I don't know about the writing. I suppose it's five minutes for the writing and about five years for the art.
Gary: I'd just like to say that the page rates on *Deadline* are excellent.
Warren: We're just saying that because we want another series when this one's over.
CW: So, you were so desperate to do this together that you were prepared to sacrifice three years of your life to photocopying pages and stapling them together.
Warren: Nah, it wasn't photocopied, it was all done at the printers.
CW: Even so, when you decided you wanted to do comics together, you didn't go hell for leather. You didn't go and find out what comics were out there and how you could get published by them?
Warren: I think it was more the fact that Gary's into films, and I was into films at college more than anything else and I used to read comics and they were similar, in a way. So when I left college, doing comics was more feasible than a sort of Orson Welles thing.
CW: Would you be happier working in films.
Warren: In my dreams, maybe. But it's not likely. . . .
Gary: . . . I think we always thought of comics as a stepping stone. . . .
CW; Towards . . . ?
Gary: Towards something other than comics. . . .
Warren: This whole thing was an accident.
Gary: That's what our Mum said.
Warren: I was encouraged to do comics at college. I was doing painting, thumbnail storyboards and my tutor suggested I turn them into comics. Then Paul Gravett saw my degree show. I'd never heard of *Escape*. Well, I had: I thought it was okay, bit of an arty approach, but that sort of worked with the 'new' comics thing at the time.
CW: Well, there was nobody in latex in *Escape*; or if they were, they had a good reason.
Gary: That was the editors.
Warren: Then when Gaz came down a couple of weeks later. . . .
Gary: . . . and you illustrated one of my short stories.
CW: To get from there to *Velocity* must have taken an enormous amount of drive. Getting money to pay printer's bills and so forth. . . .

WE OWE MARGARET THATCHER EVERYTHING

Warren: It was the days of the Enterprise Allowance scheme, when they were trying to get loads of people off the dole figures so they'd walk the election.
Gary: So we both went on the Scheme and then we had to do it. Surprising how they cancelled the Enterprise Allowance Scheme after the election. . . .
CW: So, *Velocity* came to us courtesy of the Tory Government?
Warren: We owe Margaret Thatcher everything.
Gary: The first one was about a year in the making. It was all made up of bits and pieces.
Warren: It was only after we'd done the first one that we met anyone in comics . . . People were saying, what you're doing is quite good.
Gary: That was the time when you could get two pages in the *NME*. . . .
Warren: It was the time of all the hype about Graphic Novels which was all bollocks basically.
CW: It was a very good time to start in comics, since it was the only time the media were interested in comics. And *Velocity* didn't look like anything else out there.
Warren: Well, we always had artists saying do you like so-and-so. Or that our stuff looked like Hugo . . . Hugo. . . .
CW: . . . Pratt?
Warren: Hugo Pratt, Alex Toth, William Burroughs. All these names were constantly dropped and we just kept saying. . . .
Gary: . . . Who?
Warren: Course, we'd heard of some of the writers but not the comic artists.
CW: Did *Velocity* ever break even?
Warren: The first two did. We lost money on the third one because we were complete morons as businessmen. We kept changing the price. The price was the last thing we put on before it went to print. £1.25? Nah, too cheap. £1.75 – nah, nah, nah . . . oh alright.
CW: How did Acme become involved.
Warren: Well, they stocked *Velocity* and they wanted to get into publishing, to be the cream of the small press. If we'd known how amateurish the whole set up was going to be. . . .
Gary: That was the first and only offer we had. . . .
Warren: It wasn't the only one. We had John Brown. They came second because Acme offered us a better page rate. . . .
Gary: . . . and Dick was a much nicer bloke than John Brown. He didn't have elasticated waist Marks and Spencers trousers.
Warren: We suddenly got lumped into Underground comics. I suppose we weren't mainstream, but we knew nothing about comics. We suddenly found that comics was ths little clique of people.
Gary: I mean if you work in a shoe shop, you don't go out and socialise with people who work in shoe shops.

UNTIL, THAT IS I CAUGHT CRISPIN ON THE JOB WITH THE LOCAL LIBERAL DEMOCRAT M.P.
I USED TO BE A FLOATING VOTER ... NOT ANY MORE!!
VOTE FOR ME! VOTE FOR ME!
OH, NO... NOT THE SANDALS ROUTINE AGAIN.

Warren: It was alright tho', we got invited to functions; got as many freebies as possible. Like this dinner. I mean, you know that behind your back we hate you too.
Gary: I'd just like to say I think you're one of the nicest people in comics.
CW: Obviously, *Velocity* didn't make you a lot of money.
Warren: That was when Fleetway got interested. They sent us a letter about *Velocity*, so I asked them if I could have some work. That's how I ended up doing 'True Faith'.
Gary: It's a waste of time talking about 'True Faith'.
Warren: You're not going to print that.
CW: Course I'm going to print it. What did you think about the controversy surrounding 'True Faith'.
Warren: That was just people trying to scare up some publicity about the book and it backfire. It was the sort of thing *Crisis* did at the time. I suppose the brief was to be right on. Some of the things were like that, some of the stories were good.
CW: Have you got any copies? Surely they're worth money now?
Warren: Are they? I think I've got two. It took about a year to come out and as soon as it did they took it off the shelves.


IT WENT ON A LONG TIME BUT I NEVER MOVED. I'M GOOD AT IT. I LEARNED IN ALL THE RIGHT PLACES. REFORM SCHOOL PRISON IN AFRICA, WHERE A QUIET MAN IN A RICH SUIT I MET IN A HOUSTON HOTEL ROOM SENT ME.

CW: And then there was a yawning silence.
Gary: From us? We did 'Several Colours Later' for *Revolver*.
Warren: Which was supposed to come out in *Crisis* after.
CW: And it's just finished appearing in *Deadline*, three years after the fact.
Warren: Things seemed to be going quite well. We had short stories, 'Colours' was lined up, and then *Revolver* folded and *Crisis* folded and *Xpresso* folded. It was the end of the boom. We went to a few conventions, but we always went to the bar straight away and walked around getting depressed, and the we'd just go back to the bar.

Gary: We felt a bit numbed by it all. We wanted to get across to people who didn't usually read comics. I mean none of my friends understand why we do this. So what did we do during all that time?
Warren: We sat around waiting for people to come to us. I think it's not impossible to reach an audience beyond comics fans.
CW: What do you think of current 'adult comics', *Sandman* and so forth.
Warren: I don't know. We don't read them.
CW: Surely you've seen graphic novels like *Arkham Asylum* or *Black Orchid*.
Warren: Yeah, I've flicked through them. It seems to me that most of it is complete tosh.
Gary: Who says words like 'tosh'. "It's complete tosh", you berk.
Warren: I think a lot of what passes for adult comics is sixth form writing. Pseudo intellectual prose. I mean if you want to say something, what's the point in using old characters? There's no point saying "This is about Batman, but it's about fetishism" or something. You do something new.
CW: There's a problem with using superheroes anyhow, because they can't grow, they can't evolve, they can't really change and they can't die.
Warren: The whole thing is tied in the comics market. *Arkham Asylum* was just a merchandising gimmick dressed up as art. It's like every rock band coming along and only doing covers of other peoples songs, or rehasing the sixties or the seventies.
CW: That's what they're doing now. I think we should all say in print that we hate Suede.
Warren: I hate Suede.
Gary: I hate Suede too. It's just Anthony fucking Newley.
Warren: Give me Anthony Newley any day.
CW: I don't think anybody else wants him.
Warren: That was going to be our next project. The Anthony Newley comic.
CW: Didn't you meet them when you were in Eusabio. Were you trying to be rock stars or comics people.
Warren: We didn't set out to have a multi-media enterprise. The comics and the band weren't really related. Blokes with long hair in comics are usually in dodgy 70s kind of rock bands.
CW: But, at one point, for 30 seconds, the *NME* thought you were the next big thing.
Gary: It was all sort of jokey, matey, "let's do it for a laugh". All that sort of baggy shit was another gimmick. But we were there before then. We were doing that before bands like Blur and we got lumped in with them.
CW: Probably on account of your boyish charm. But you didn't ever think you were destined for stardom. You didn't think you'd one day appear on *The Word*.
Gary: CBS bollocked us around for a long time. It was all going really well. We had a single and a three album deal. Then Sony bought out CBS and it all collapsed. The people we'd been working with were out. Then we were promised Sony would pick us up.
Warren: But we didn't have the rockstar attitude. We'd come off stage after a set and make a cup of tea. Thing is, we were all cynical about it – we weren't seventeen year olds who just wanted to be in a band.
CW: So you just abandoned music after that.
Gary: I'm always meeting guitarists in pubs but they want to be all things. One minute they're doing Rage Against the Machine, next they're doing a slick Brand New Heavies.
CW: So what did you do during the 'wilderness' years while you waited for 'Several Colours' to appear?
Gary: Got burgled twice. Moved about six times. Sat around and waited for people to phone us. We finished *Velocity* four and five.
Warren: Five was released late and though we finished six, it was never published and then there was *Glory Glory*.
Gary (knowingly): Aaaah!
CW: Tell me about the mysterious *Glory Glory*.
Warren: Do I say what I think? Tundra were to blame.
Gary: Stuart (Green) and Frank (Plowright) had this brilliant idea for a football comic. Actually, I'd submitted a football strip to Stuart for *Blast* which gave him the idea, I think. They went to Tundra with this idea and wanted x amount of money a week.
Warren: Tundra went for it. From what I can gather, it was "What else can I chuck my money at". When I think of Tundra I just remember the launch party. Must have cost twenty grand.
CW: It was good, though.
Warren: The budget for *Glory Glory* was huge. It was supposed to be a quarter of a million. It was a good idea, but it was so disorganised. We got about six months work out of that. But it was never published.
CW: You've got a lot of work that's never been published.
Warren: People say to us "At least you got paid for it." But that's not the point, you do work because you want it to be seen. In the end you end up paying for other people's mistakes.
CW: And then Dark Horse came knocking at your door?
Warren: We'd sent out a lot of stuff to publishers and we got good responses from Art Spiegelman, Fantagraphics, Dark Horse.
Gary: Spiegelman sent us a nice letter saying "What are you guys on? Is this some kind of English joke at our expense."
Warren: Then Jerry Prosser from Dark Horse approached us to do something. It was an Andrew Vachs adaptation. That was how the idea for *Skin Graft* came up. Jerry had an idea for a four issue series for Vertigo he asked me to draw it. I think it's good. I think it's some of the best stuff that's come out of DC. I'd still prefer us to be doing our own stuff.
Gary: We always say we want to do our own stuff, but we never do these days. We don't try hard enough. We don't tout. I think its a lack of confidence.
Warren: I think doing other work helps to get the name known. That way we can do our own work: the work I do for DC doesn't relate in any way to our own stuff.
Gary: It's so far from anything we would do together.
Warren: And this is the way to get our own work published. I think someone should just give us fifty grand a year to do our own stuff, then we'd be happy, but it won't happen. And it shouldn't happen. We may not always like the industry, but on the whole, we've managed to get some of our own stuff out there.
CW: So what are you doing now?
Gary: We're doing a new series for *Deadline* called 'The Countess' which should be starting soon. And some stuff for the new *Roy of the Rovers*. We're doing another Andrew Vachs adaptation.
Warren: And we've got a lot of ideas to put to people. I think it'll happen this time. We have to sell ourselves more so this time, we're going to people's offices with a machete.
Gary: And a Suede album.
Warren: They'll have to publish our stuff then.

DIRECT MARKET

This is an open column for retailers to air their views, share a few picks or make a few points. This month, it's the turn of Rob Rudderham *of* 30th Century Comics.

The last five years have seen the comics industry dragged screaming into the late 20th century syndrome of marketing hype. You know what I mean – mass advertising, multi-media merchandising and a volume of publications springing up to cover the world of comics, And to this flame seemingly come the moths of speculation, chasing the hot title of the week. It used to be the hot title of the month or the quarter, but these days burn out on hot comics is so quick that would-be speculators must begin to get really concerned with getting stuck with titles that may be white-hot when previewed and solicited, but are positively lukewarm by the time they actually come out (*Deathmate*, anyone?).

I remember just before all this hype and the wonderful world of foil-stamped, diecut, holographic covers and bagged-with-trading-card packages that the word was that comics were coming of age. Works such as Moore and Gibbon's *Watchmen* and Miller's *Dark Knight* were critically acclaimed as transcending the medium and reaching the mass market, giving comics an adult reputation and laying the ghost of the comics-are-for-kids label (although comics are for kids, as well – publishers take note). As a fan, I looked forward to my favourite medium finally getting the recognition it deserved.

So what happened? I guess someone realised that comics had grown up enough to be really big business. Somehow the marketing seemed to take over. The emphasis switched from quality to gimmicks and comics seemed to be sold not on the strength of the story and art, but on multiple covers and other such devices, and that most redundant (to my mind) trick, the premium edition. And the content? Too often, it seemed, the hype was backed up by those cheapest of mass appeal manipulations, sexual titillation and graphic violence. One company, Image, although set up with the most worthy of establishments – creators' rights – typify the worst aspects of the hype – they put out more ads than they do comics, and their publication schedules are shot to hell. Ultimately, I suspect, the latter is a classic case of shooting themselves in the foot, and already there are signs that their market is falling and their universe fragmenting.

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Indeed, perhaps I'm being a little optimistically reckless here, but maybe we're turning the corner. It seems to me that the day of the marketing gimmick may be fast fading. Or, I should put that another way. The industry is rediscovering the best and most effective marketing gimmick of all – quality in story and art. Good stories seemed to be all but ignored in the flash and dazzle of recent years. Marvel have been spreading themselves too thin; DC were chasing editorially up too many blind alleys; Image have hot artists but what about hot writers? And Valiant certainly had good stories in the Shooter days (and indeed, these were the cornerstone of their success), but interest has definitely cooled as too many of their books are produced by second-stringers.

The potentially hot comics of today and tomorrow (and the industry will now always have to have its hot comics) are Shooter's Defiant line, Malibu's Ultraverse (I guess) and those old favourites, Superman and Batman. It has done this jaded old fan's heart good to see the big two at the top again, and DC seem to be the most solid company currently, with room for everything from the mood of the Vertigo imprint to the fun and appeal of *Batman Adventures* and the *Legionnaires*. The emphasis in all these is on good writing backed up by solid art by professionals who have had time to learn their craft. Yes, I know all of these are supported by just the sort of hype I criticised above. But there's a place for it when it publicises comics of substance which are both well written, drawn and edited. And publications such as the one you are reading are to be applauded for discussing the art of the industry and not merely the speculative value of the latest hot book.

Comics are an art form but they're also a business. The two should not be mutually exclusive, but neither should we take it for granted that they will be complementary. Ultimately, when comics are produced that justify the hype, that's the best news for the industry, for the publishers, the creators, the journalists, the retailers, and, best of all, you, the readers.

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PHIL HALL EXAMINES THE PROSPECTS OF A SILVER AGE COMEBACK

So Atomeka has bitten the dust, for all its worthy intentions, it was too vainglorious for its own good. In its wake we have a table full of finished and half finished projects with no guarantee they will see print. Dave Elliott and co. were defiant up till the end, but when news filtererd through that Bisley was going, many saw the writing on the wall. Simon Bisley was a lucky one, probably one of the few people to make any money out of an ambitious, yet ill timed attempt at 'flogging a dead horse'.

I make no apologies for my deceased equine description of Tundra, metaphorically, it is an incorrect statement but the truth of the matter is that, with the exception of Deadline (which now aims itself at a decidedly non-mainstream comic buying public), Britains only truly successful fantasy (and I use the term broadly) publishers are Fleetway with *2000AD* and Marvel for continuing the cult favourite *Doctor Who*. British publishing ventures struggle to survive without two things, originality and money, without both, it's the same old story. Harrier Comics; Quality Comics; Trident/ Apocalypse, to name but three who have tried and failed to crack a market, which for some strange reason, never wants to be particularly receptive. I haven't got any big ideas how any indepedent would-be British publishers such as Monolith Publishing or CM Comics can succeed, this in an industry that is renowned for welcoming new ventures with open arms and then, quite openly leads them to the sacrificial altar.

I believe that the term 'British comics fan' doesn't exist, he/she is an American comics fan, he/she just might read something British, maybe. *2000AD* sells far more copies in newsagents than it ever will in comic specialist shops, in my retailer days nearly 50 of my standing order customers read *2000AD*, three of them bought it from me. None of my customers bought their Marvels and DCs from the newsagent. The bottom line was, I stocked very few British weekly titles, it is a newsagent tradition.

When it came down to British monthlies or periodicals, the hard fact is that – and many small independent retailers will agree – there isn't enough shelf space to experiment with something other than Marvel, DC, Image, Valiant, Dark Horse, Malibu and known money spinners. Of course, to stand a dogs chance of succeeding, a new company has to produce material of a high calibre and more than once in a blue moon.

For British independent publishers to succeed, they either need to produce a comic magazine that can garner the same shelf space as *Viz* or *2000AD* in W.H. Smith's or appeal to comic specialist retailers, and impress them enough to *want* to give a publication shelf space. Sadly, the only company doing this is nothing more than a glorified reprint house.

One possible solution to the British comic publishing dilemma could be for the people behind new publishing ventures to actively seek out staff who understand what the customer wants, how it should be packaged, what price it should be or as has seemed with so many before, what the decor of the office should be!

THE TERM 'BRITISH COMICS FAN' DOESN'T EXIST

The repercussions of Atomeka's downfall however may have an effect on the whole of the comics industry. If a company with sufficient financial backing and a solid creative base can fall by the way, what hope the tiny independent? The market is having enough trouble sustaining so much product, that the image of independent publishing may change forever. Expect more casualties over the coming months.

There once was a time when comics publishing wasn't the multi-million dollar machine that it is today, a time when superheroes were younger and everything was just a little simpler. The Silver Age as it has become known as, encapsulates the period between the first appearance of Barry Allen – The Flash, to approximately 1970; many people feel the Silver Age ended in the late sixties, others feel that *Conan the Barbarian 1* in October 1970 signalled a new era for comics.

The Silver Age reintroduced comic readers to such famous creators as Jack Kirby, Wally Wood, Carmine Infantino, Steve Ditko, Stan Lee and John Buscema, it also introduced us to a new breed of younger, fresher talent; Sal Buscema, Neal Adams, Jim Steranko, Barry Smith and Roy Thomas.

With such a glut of new hot product on comic shop shelves at the present time, it is not surprising to see 'more mature' comics fans returning to their roots and rediscovering the comics which first enthralled them. Retailers, mail order specialists and casual comic mart dealers are all reporting a gradual improvement in Silver Age titles and for once they seem to have veered towards consolidating rather than making a lot of money fast. During the eighties, when virtually any comic older than 15 years was deemed to be collectable, prices rocketed so high and so fast, collectors ignored the golden oldies in favour of the limited edition or platinum edition or limited print run comic. Hoping to make enough money to reinvest in even more hot comics, sadly that market lasted about as long as Atomeka. Now, as a little more sanity has returned to back issue buying it is the sixties classics from Marvel and DC which are getting justified attention and for all the right reasons. Prices have come down on non-key issues and the prospect of owning a full set of *Tales to Astonish, Mystery in Space* or *Avengers* is not the impossible dream many believed it would be in 1989.

Despite the higher prices being asked for Silver Age comics over the last five years, at least they have steadily gained in value. What price *X-Force 1, X-Men 1, Legends of the Dark Knight 1, Superman 75* or *Spawn 1*? Will the outrageous prices still being asked for Valiant titles apply in five years?

A good tip for wouldbe investors and speculators wishing to follow the rocky path of new releases, will find the best policy is not to buy anything that is hyped by the major companies, or for that matter, the major distributors. They should wait until the price has at least trebled,

ANTOMEKA'S DOWNFALL HOWEVER MAY HAVE AN EFFECT ON THE WHOLE INDUSTRY

and the indications are that there will be no 2nd printings, reprints in trade paperbacks or masses of bulk storage copies circulating. Maybe, you might have a better than average chance of retaining and improving on the price you purchased it at.

My Silver Age tips for the forthcoming year are at least unusual, mainly as there has been price hikes on most titles from Marvel and DC, but potential investors can't go wrong if they start buying up 10 and 12 cent Marvel Westerns such as *Kid Colt: Outlaw* or *Rawhide Kid*. The much maligned romance comics or girls titles are steadily growing in popularity, *Millie the Model* and *Patsy Walker* may have been the brunt of many fanboy jokes over the last three decades, yet *Millie the Model Annual 1* is reported to be one of the rarest comics in Britain, with only two copies known to belong to private collectors. DC's *Strange Adventures, House of Secrets, House of Mystery* and *Tales of the Unexpected* are all titles – save the odd issue – that won't make big holes in your bank balance. The market for Silver Age titles may seem to be selective and untouchable by most comic readers, but if I had been the man who paid £600 for a copy of the Platinum *Spider-Man 1*, I think I would have been better off spending the money on *Tales to Astonish 27*. Three years on the former is worth only a third of its peak selling price. A near mint copy of Ant Man's first appearance sold for £900 recently.

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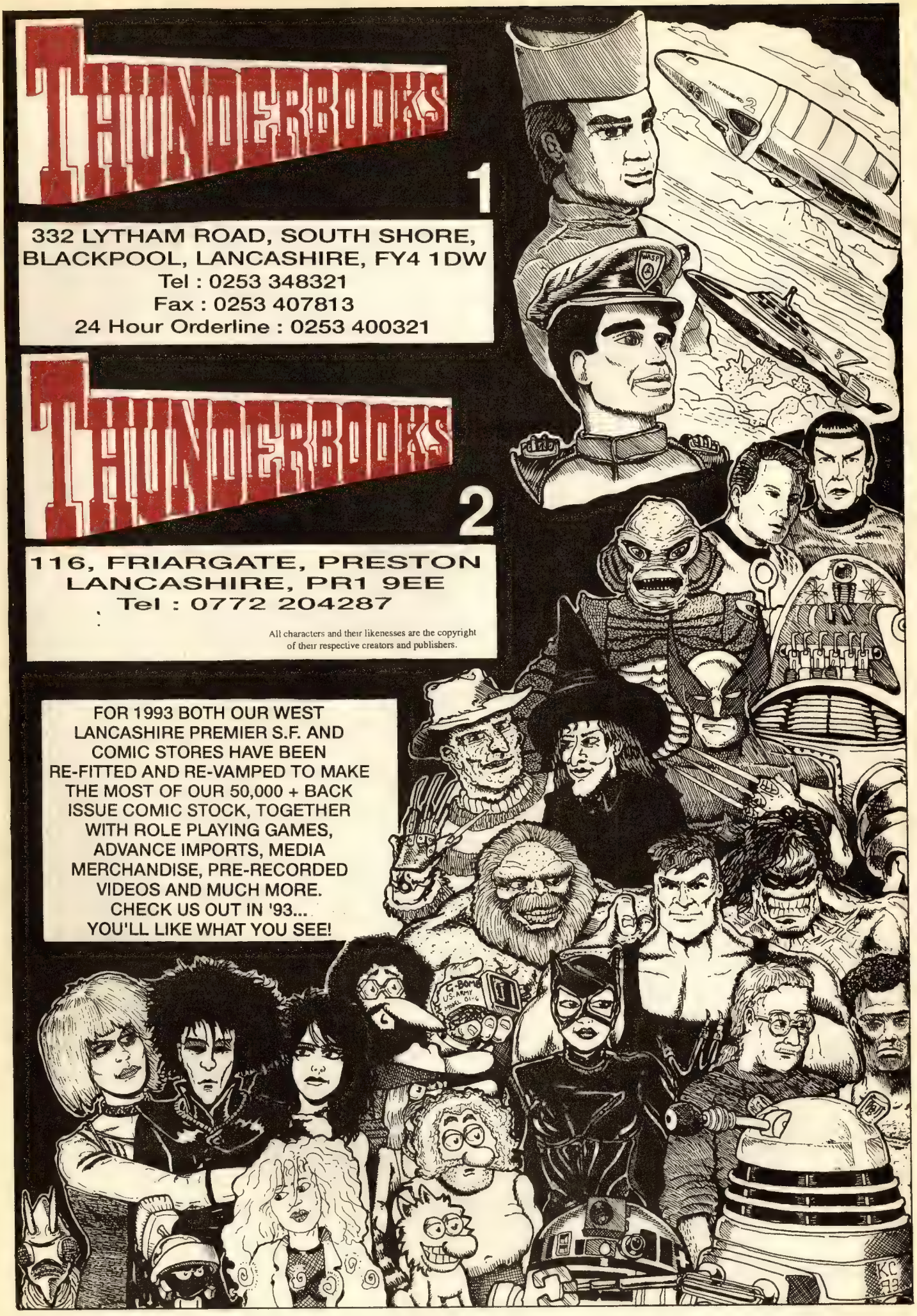


BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH IS UNQUESTIONABLY ONE OF THE MASTERS OF COMIC BOOK ART. IN A CAREER THAT SPANS A QUARTER OF A CENTURY HE HAS TURNED HIS PEN TO SOME OF THE FIELD'S TOP CREATIONS, AND CREATED IN *ARCHER AND ARMSTRONG* TWO CHARACTERS WHO HAVE ALREADY BECOME CLASSICS FOR THE NINETIES. IN THE FIRST OF THIS TWO-PART INTERVIEW WE LOOK BACK AT BARRY'S CAREER AS AN ARTIST IN COMICS AND PAINTING.

MAKING BIG PICTURES

Art © Gorblimey Press unless noted

"How far back do you want to go?" I ask, innocently. "It's the first interview you've done since...when? 1986? There's going to be a lot of new fans who will only know your work for Valiant. Do you want to talk about stuff back at the beginning?"

Barry winces. "That's what everybody does," he groans. "Are you sure you want to do that? I do interviews so rarely that every five or six years I have to go through the whole rigmarole of introducing myself.

"Why don't we lie? Why don't we say I'm 22 and just started in the field. They'll probably go for that more than finding out that I'm some old geezer who's been around for 25 years. I can dig out an old photo of myself from artschool and we could just lie..."

▲ Psyche (1980)

At 22, Barry Windsor-Smith has a glittering future ahead of him, unknown before his startling debut with the special 'Rune' serial in Malibu's Ultraverse...

Something like that? It sounds like a company supplied biog where every creator is a star brighter than the last. In reality, where time *is* absolute, most fans will know his work for Valiant, where he created and helped to create *Archer and Armstrong*, *Unity*, and the *Eternal Warrior*; but not even there will you find the origins of Barry Windsor-Smith, a singularly unique talent, a maker of big pictures, a shaper of styles, his influence found in artists ranging from P. Craig Russell to Dave Sim. In the seventies his work on Conan revitalised the sword and sorcery genre; he won awards, then turned his back on the comic industry, setting up the Gorblimey Press, to publish prints and portfolios, only returning to comics in the mid-eighties.

The precis can't do the man justice, and captures nothing of the essence of the work which led Archie Goodwin to describe him as a "seminal influence" who had "blurred many of the artificial barriers between fine illustration and fine art".

This is the sixth interview that Barry's done today, and, overdosed on strangers, the relief of this being the last one shows. "Can you imagine? Y'know, I'm starting to repeat myself here, Steve. I'm almost saying this like rote now..."

THE REAL BWS

Born in Forest Gate, London, Barry Smith developed an interest in drawing which led him to a place at East Ham Technical College at 16 to study art and life drawing; this was London in the mid-sixties, the twin influences of the Beatles and Jack Kirby motivating his desire to get out of the East End and into comics. "My only desire was to work for Marvel," Smith admits. Even his life drawings from models were drawn in Kirby-esque comic strip style.

In 1967 he approached Odhams Press who were publishing the Power group of comics which were reprinting classic early Marvel material – Spider-Man, Fantastic Four, Thor, X-Men, Iron Man...Smith became the pin-up artist for the back covers of *Terrific* and *Fantastic*, also drawing splash pages inside where a story was split into two for serialization. The work was crude by anyone's standards, but the steady acceptance of work fired his enthusiasm. From a script by Steve Parkhouse, another student from college, Smith drew a sample strip featuring The Inhumans and sent it to Marvel in the USA.

The reply from Stan Lee was encouraging, and the two responded to his invitation to 'drop by and see us' by taking a tramp steamer to the States. At the Marvel offices they picked up a try out, a western plot by Roy Thomas which was not intended for publication, but appeared two years later in *Western Gunfighters*. The story, 'Outcast' was pure Kirby in its anatomy and rendering, although described by one critic as "something more than that. Perspective is, when not abysmally wrong, powerfully distorted; guns, hands and horses explode from almost every panel in a bravado display of foreshortening. What he loses in rendering, and much of the art is crude, he almost makes up for in pure energy."

It was energy that carried Smith through: he picked up work on *X-Men*, *Daredevil*, *Nick Fury* and *The Avengers*, living in a seedy hotel on the poverty line, drawing strips on park benches – too much for Steve Parkhouse who only lasted one more script. Smith's visitors visa ran out and he was threatened with deportation, forced to return to England, although had established himself enough to continue working for Marvel from Britain.

For the next fourteen months he had an attorney in America argue his case for a work permit with the immigration authority, eventually returning to the USA in January 1971. During the period working in Britain he had drawn various horror stories, and a Howard-esque barbarian, 'Starr the Slayer', although the work trailed off, leaving Smith depressed and feeling that his career was finished.

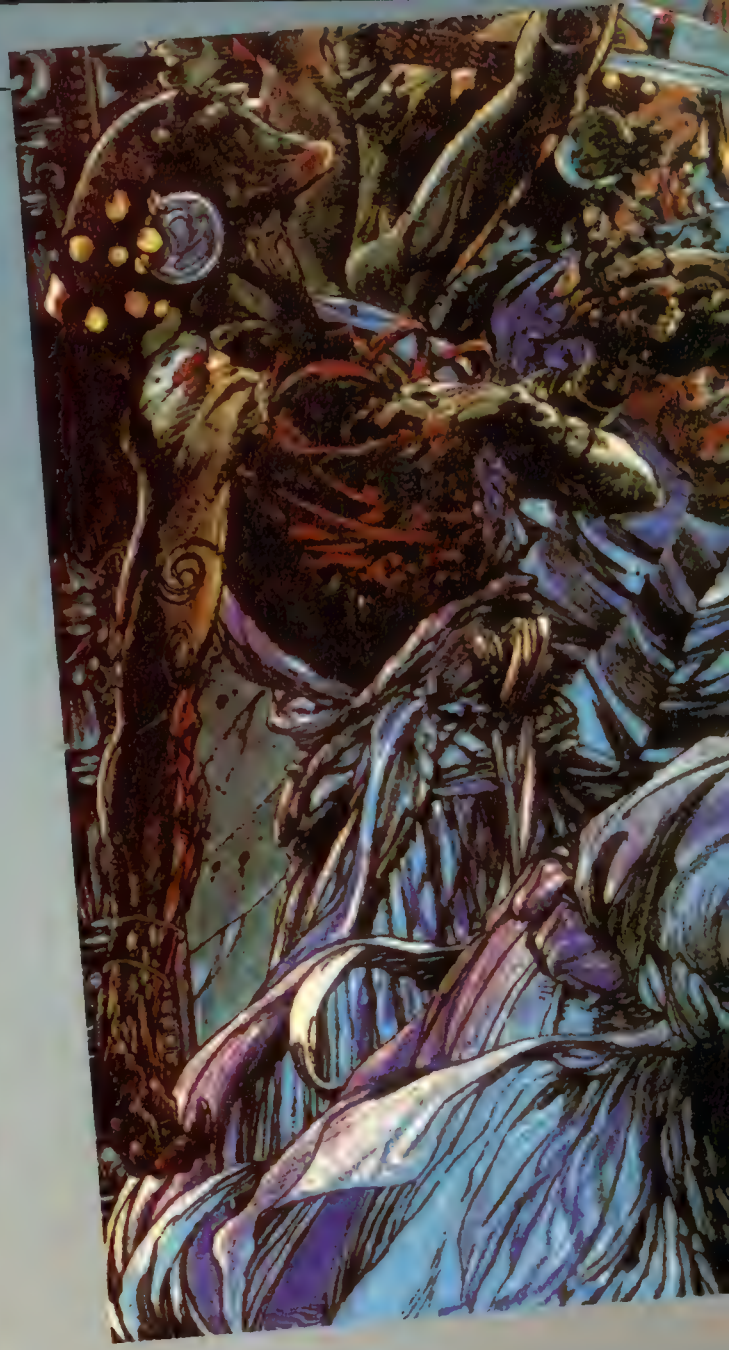
▲ *Conan, © Marvel Entertainment Group*

The next script to arrive at his door, however, was Conan the Barbarian, adapted by Roy Thomas from Robert E. Howard's 1930s sword and sorcery hero. From the first, Smith's pencils showed greater assurity, both in his figurework (which had been lacklustre and uninspiring) and the avante-garde layouts which had been a feature of his Sterenko-influenced *Daredevil*. Within two issues, Smith had shaken off the Kirby influence – the workless period having given him time to think about his art and absorb a wider range of styles – replaced by lithe figures and romanesque faces, aided considerably by the more traditional inking style of Sal Buscema.

The character was further refined by issue 4, a turning point for Smith who had previously looked upon the character as little more than a swashbuckling superhero. The story, 'The Tower of the Elephant', was quintessential Robert E. Howard Conan, and Smith responded with his best work to date, later saying "It had everything I ever wanted to do...the magic, the other-worldliness, the decadence of far civilisations, the lean hero striving through it." Smith, in Conan, brought together other influences, particularly that of Alphonse Mucha, the artist largely responsible for the art nouveau movement in the 1890s, whose work invariably featured idealised women dressed in endlessly flowing robes

▼ *The Beguiling*

HIGH MUTE AND FOOLISH AS A BOY I SHUDDERED AT THE TOUCH OF HER CHASTE AND GENTLE FINGERS –
AND THE BRUSH OF HER WARM SWEET BREATH
SET MY YOUNG BLOOD AFLAME!
"I AM THINE," SHE MURMURED, AND THOU SHALT BE ONE WITH ME."
AND WHO WOULD BE DEAF TO SUCH MELODY, AS I TOOK HER PALE HAND GESTURE.
...AND AS IF WHOLE MIND TAKEN MY BRAIN IN THE ALL RUSHING...
I FOLLOW'D THROUGH BRIAR AND STONE...
...AS IF IT WERE MYSTIC SHORE!
AND THEN MY PUMPING BREATH WAS BECALMED–
MY YEARNING HEART TRANSFIXED–
IN THIS QUIET GLORY OF LOVE FULFILLED



against elaborately, frequently floral, patterned backgrounds, which gave Smith's preoccupation with decoration a focus.

The first seven issues of Conan were drawn in the UK, by which time Smith's application to move to America had come through, and he returned, taking an enforced absence from Conan for three months. When he returned to the title, another influence was clearly manifested, that of John Everett Millais and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood; his first chance encounter was in the Tate Gallery when he came across a Millais picture which stopped him in his tracks, and most of his Marvel paycheques were being spent on art books that were influencing the aesthetics of his work as well as challenging the premises of his surface artwork. The Pre-Raphaelites, notably Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Holman Hunt, fought the apathetic system employed by the Royal Academy, at the time overwhelmed by the work of the Italian artist Raphael and those who had followed in his footsteps over the next three centuries, picking up the surface technique without any of the emotional content or understanding the underlying principals of the style. It's a familiar story in comics where Jack Kirb Neal Adams and others have become templates for artists to slavishly follow.

Smith's new found style was best expressed in stories like 'Hawks From the Sea' (*Conan #19*), which was half-printed from pencils, 'Song of Red Son (*Conan #24*) and the adaptation of 'Re Nails' (*Savage Tales #2-3*). By setting figures in a realistic and intricately detailed background, using panels as decorative design, but retaining the energy of comic book characterisation, Smith was able to meld the diverse techniques, an art recognised by the Academy of Comic Book Art who awarded him their Best New Talent for 1970, and Best Comic Book – for *Cona* – in 1971 and 1972.

But Smith was becoming increasingly unhappy with his relationship with Marvel, resenting the Marvel system which retained his artw and reprinted his stories without payin royalties. He quit Conan, founding the Gorblimey Press in 1974, and worked solely on prints and portfolios, often drawing on Howard in the early days, concentrating on a series of increasing more ambitious paintings. In 1975 he joined Jeff Jones, Mike Kaluta and Be

▼ From Revenge, an unfinished strip from the 1980s

▼ A Path of Stars

Wrightson at The Studio (details of which can be found in *The Studio*, published by Dragon's Dream) which galvanised him further to experiment with his painting and illustrating, telling stories in single frames, and culminating in his first full oil painting, *Fate Sowing the Stars*, in 1977.

THE RETURN OF BWS

"I didn't really quit it," says Barry when I mention the Gorblimey Press. "There wasn't any lowering of the flag, but I sort of stopped publishing material. The last piece I put out was *Psyche*. I was doing that for eleven years, and I thought I'd produced some pretty good stuff, and for a while that was all I wanted to do.

"The process of being a painter, of being a maker of big pictures, is a wholly, totally different mind-set from being a comic book artist. I find no comparison between them at all, with the exception of instruments like pencils and brushes. Other than that there's no connection at all.

"After 11 years of Gorblimey Press it took me an awful lot to try and re-understand the process of making a comic book. This is why I was working with Herb Trimpe on the *Machine Man* – he was helping me get my head back together again. I always had the storytelling, but its entirely two different universes. The first two issues were pretty strong layouts from Herb, who allowed me to change just about everything that was there – but without his initial layouts it would have been utterly lost. I'd have been sitting there trying to create art instead of a comic book.

"By the fourth issue I was writing, drawing, inking and colouring the whole thing, so I got back into it pretty damn quickly, but it was all Herb's help that allowed me to do that, otherwise I'd have been like Jackson Pollack trying to draw a comic, it was that alien to me."

By the time of *Machine Man*, Smith – now Windsor-Smith, adopting an old family name – had briefly appeared in *Epic Illustrated*, the story 'The Beguiling' showing the profound mixture of painting and comic book storytelling that he was now capable of. His new found enthusiasm for comics in the 1980s was marked by some remarkable strips, and marred to a degree by the lack of a regular title. "I just didn't want to commit to a monthly book, which is why I kept sodding around with *X-Men* and *Daredevil* fill-ins," he admits.

You'll find the details on the accompanying Stripography, but if you based your views on what was published it would appear that he had come back into comics only half-heartedly. Not true. What a list misses out is the efforts put in between projects (some unpublished, such as a Ben Grimm mini-series and a Hulk graphic novel), the hole in his publishing schedule also filled with the work he put into the 13-part 'Weapon X' origin of Wolverine for the bi-weekly *Marvel Comics Presents*: "I was doing 'Weapon X' for two years, and there was a layoff of about six months in 1988 because I had a serious car accident. It wasn't as if I wasn't doing anything for those two years – I was producing 'Weapon X' and an X-Men book which never got published.

"I started with Valiant just as the 'Weapon X' series was ending...so there! You got all your facts wrong. What a professional! I'm not impressed."

Thankfully, he's laughing as he says it...

Next: "I lost three days a week travelling, so that leaves, what? Four days – eight – sixteen days a month to write, draw and produce Archer and Armstrong."

"He doesn't just suck your neck delicately, he bites half your torso off and feasts on it."

"Somebody less astute might say, 'ello, Barry's knowledge of human anatomy has really gone wrong now. He must be on drugs or something..."

Stripography – page 47

▼ Weapon X © Marvel Entertainment Group

LOOK AT THAT! LOGAN'S RIGHT IN THERE! HE'S JUST AS WILD AS BEFORE!
HE MAY SEEM SO, DOCTOR, BUT IN THE PAST FEW DAYS, WEAPON-X HAS BEEN CHANGED IRREVOCABLY.
HIS SAVAGERY IS NOW TEMPERED BY AND RATIOCINATION.
ANY HESITATION--
A MOMENT OF FEAR OR MERE CAUTION--
AND HE WILL BE UNDONE!
YEAH, LIKE LITERALLY, RIGHT?
IT HAS BEEN NECESSARY THAT LOGAN SHOULD NOT KNOW OF HIS INDESTRUCTIBLE SKELETON.
WON'T HELP HIM IF HE GETS DISEMBOWELED, PROFESSOR.
NO, HE COULD LEARN IT ALL THE HARD WAY, IT'S TRUE
CAMERA FOUR, HINES
YES, DOCTOR. SWITCHING.
HE'S GETTING THE ADVANTAGE, PROFESSOR.
BUT NOT SO LONG AGO WEAPON-X BEHEADED A GRIZZLY BEAR WITHOUT HESITATION--WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A TUSSLE--!
THAT IS WHAT I CALL GETTING THE ADVANTAGE.
YOU GOTTA HAVE SOME FAITH, PROFESSOR! LOOK--I'LL LAY YOU A HUNDRED ON LOGAN. WHADDAYA THINK OF THAT?
GIMME FULL ON SIX, HINES. C'MON, WAKE UP!
ER... SWITCHING!

PAUL H. BIRCH PLAYS DEVIL'S ADVOCATE TO GARTH ENNIS AND JOHN MCCREA

TO HELL WITH HIS

Some eighteen months back Alan Grant made it known he planned on quitting writing* The Demon, *so inevitably numerous individuals applied for the job. Then, as if it were an elaborate practical joke, Grant did a U-turn and decided to hang round for a while, only to resign again when* Lobo *began demanding his attention. Learning this, Garth Ennis dialled 0101.

"I rang Dan Raspler and reminded him about the stuff I'd sent." Northern Ireland's finest had doubled his DC workload.

"Out of the first load of stories I sent, I did actually get to write one fill-in episode which is now #40, and I think it was that more than anything that convinced Dan I could do it."

Naturally, nothing proceeds logically in this business, so although he and artist John McCrae debut that issue, they skip #41 to do *The Demon Annual*, returning for the long haul with #42.

"The annual ties into *Bloodlines* which was interesting for me because I haven't handled many DC superhero universe characters. Back in January when Dan offered *The Demon Annual* to me I hadn't actually had the regular series confirmed.

"It seemed fairly easy; you just put this alien monster into the Annual and by the end of the book it has to create this new superhero. I was kind of lucky because they gave me the great big fat alien, which meant I could have Etrigan beating the crap out of it and making jokes about its weight!"

Word is the book's in for an overhaul?

"I think it's going to have to be because the stuff that Alan was doing had just about reached the end of the road. It's not going to be a grim, dark Vertigo type of book, there's still going to be a lot of humour in it. If you ever saw Alan Moore's stuff when he wrote Etrigan into *Swamp Thing*, there's a lot of that sort of thing.

"I'm doing it in 3 and 4 part stories. The basic premise is that Etrigan gets completely fed up of cooperating with Jason, which I don't think was ever going to work anyway. I've certainly toughened Jason Blood up a lot, I see him more as a cold-hearted swine. Etrigan's decided 'To hell with this!' because he's been offered a new job by the angels running Hell, that of Hell's hit-man. It's his job to go around killing any demons who escape from Hell and if they get any supernatural problems they send Etrigan in as a one-man Swat team. The way I see Etrigan – he *is* a demon, a creature of evil: the only reason he's going to fight bad guys is if he thinks they're badder than he is, and he doesn't like the idea of that. There's going to be as much supernatural bastardry as I can cram in."

This is reflected in the work John McCrae's turning out for the book.

"I love the way he draws Etrigan; he's dark and nasty but at the same time it has a sense of humour about it. I couldn't have aked for anybody better."

It's the kind of enthusiasm he has for Steve Dillon's art on *Hellblazer*, who'll be with him on the title until this time next year when Garth, at least, bows out. The writer refutes the likelihood of crossovers between *Hellblazer* and *The Demon*.

"I only have 10 more to write; I know what's going to be in each issue, and it's not the Demon, plus I think they're planning on keeping the Vertigo pretty separate from the DC universe, although I often thought Constantine and Blood might work quite well together, just to have a chat, but not with Etrigan – it's a different tone."

SELLING YOUR

"Don't blame me the title was Garth's idea!" jokes John McCrea. No we're not talking demonically yet, wait a paragraph or three. I'm asking the man about* Dicks, *the follow-up to* Troubled Souls, *and* For A Few Troubles More, *concerning – you guessed it – private detectives. Described as "even more ludicrous" than its predecessor, it unfortunately now hangs in comic book limbo.

"It's in black & white, and I've done 80 pages out of the 120. I was paid by Fleetway for the first 3 episodes no problem." When Tundra UK was launched, the initial publicity spiel promised *Dicks* as a 4 issue mini-series.

"Dave Elliott seemed really enthusiastic about it. He said 'Let's go ahead,' so I did a cover and the next 50 pages and got paid, but Dave was mea to pay Fleetway – basically the money they'd paid us – and he never got roun to it. It's a crying shame. The bottom fe out of Tundra and *Dicks* is one of the things that got chucked onto the waysid So Fleetway still own the copyright to th characters and if we do want to get it published somewhere else they'd have pay Fleetway for those pages we did fo them."

After a *Centurions* job, two *Action Forces* where he at least got to "draw cool ninjas", and a few bits and pieces *Blaam!* and *Sideshow Comics*, it looke like John had settled in at Fleetway, moving sideways from *Crisis* onto *2000AD* and *The Judge Dredd*

So with the *Hellblazer Special* described as, "A nasty wee story that I managed to put together," out now, what's in store for the monthly?

"After we catch up with his girlfriend in Belfast to see what she's doing, Constantine just about manages to pull himself back from the brink because he's fairly down on his luck at the minute and goes to America for what he thinks is going to be a bit of a breather. Then he comes back and tries to patch things up with his various friends. After that I'll begin a six part story which will finish my run, and in that he'll have his final confrontation with the devil.

From one extreme to another – at least as far as titling goes – he's written *The Goddess* for Vertigo.

"Phil Winslade's been given a very long schedule. I've seen the pencils for six out of the eight issue and they look absolutely spectacular! I'm sure that once it comes out his phone isn't going to stop ringing with people offering him work.

"It's a kind of epic adventure story. It's on a very broad canvas as opposed to the introverted inner city type stories you seem to be getting a lot of these days. There's a girl who works in a zoo in a small town in England and she starts developing these powers that she can't control. It's a complete mystery to her, she can't switch them on and off at will, but she appears to be able to do anything. So with a bunch of her friends,

THERE'S GOING TO BE AS MUCH SUPERNATURAL BASTARDRY AS I CAN CRAM IN

who seem more a hindrance than help, she sets off to try to discover what's happened to her: it's bigger than she could ever imagine. She's also got the CIA on her tail with a druggened psychotic commander in charge and a friendly British bobby after her," laughing, "a friendly British bobby being another kettle of fish entirely."

And there are more projects waiting in the wings, two of which can now be revealed.

"I've written the first two parts of a

SOUL . . .

Megazine, but even though he hints that on his latterday stints there, "Things round Fleetway weren't the greatest then," the reason he's no longer working for the company appears more to do with the fact that drawing for an American publisher is something that's held its appeal since childhood. No doubt the additional royalty incentives have also played their part.

"Working with Dan Raspler on *The Demon*, is great. As far as I know, the sales on it weren't too good when Garth and I joined. Garth has basically kept the same old silly humour but in a darker way. There's a lot of nastiness and moodiness, but it's still a good fun read. Garth's doing some very good writing at the momeny on *Hellblazer*, and while it's not the same kind of style, it's just as good on *The Demon*. That said of course, I looked at the way *The Demon* had been drawn up to now and thought *This doesn't look like a demon, it looks more*

GARTH ENNIS
CONTINUED

three parts *Legends of the Dark Knight* to be drawn by Will Simpson. That'll just come out as and when really, Archie Goodwin's quite sensible that way.

"Carlos Ezquerra and I am doing a four part series for Dark Horse comics. He showed me a sketchbook a couple of years ago and it was crammed full with brilliant character designs. There was this rather grizzled woman in her forties, she looked a hard sort of a person, so was obviously tough, but she also looked as if she'd been through a war which interested me, as opposed to one of these standard bimbos. He gave this to me to see what I could come up with." Thus we have the near-futuristic story of *Bloody Mary*.

"On the face of it it's an action-adventure thing, but we managed to cram in enough what I like to think of as *2000AD* style humour to keep us both happy. I'm not a complete fan of these straight action stories that the Americans seem to prefer: I like something with a humorous twist to it. I've written the first episode and we're into pay negotiations with Dark Horse; talk about good companies, my experience with them so far have been fantastic."

With all this on his plate, one might assume he's said farewell to Fleetway. But it ain't so.

"I was getting ready to settle back and do my retainer twelve Dredd's a year which would have suited me nicely. But they phoned up and said that Grant Morrison, Mark Millar and John Smith weren't going to do as many as they

JOHN McCREA
CONTINUED

like a teddy bear! It's not terribly demonesque as it were. I guess that's people's slant on Kirby. He's a hard man to follow – to imitate and pull it off well – and I just figured there's no point in even bothering, certainly not the Kirby aspect, or the way Val Semeik did it, because, while it worked for him for a while, towards the end I think it became a parody of the way it started off. Etrigan came across as a big muppet who breathed flames. What I've done is nastied him up, made him thin, bony and gnarly with big jagged teeth – sort of Gigeresque," laughing, "At least that's what I'm after!" And he's not too far off the mark. Words like invigorating, spunky, animated, and that verboten one of late, sequential, all come to mind when looking over John's original art. Work which he's also inking, and doing covers for.

"I didn't have enough time to ink all *The Demon Annual*, the rest was inked by Matt Brooker who did a great job, and Luke McDonnell who did not quite such a good job. Obviously my pencils are a bit hard to follow for other people." That's one way of putting it.

"I don't like really extraneous detail that much, though I can get carried away occasionally. The annual had these aliens which were designed by Arthur Adams: brilliant artist but I'd like to kill

thought they would be able to for one reason or another." Garth could only agree to up his quota to 15–20 Dredd episodes a year.

"I don't know who's going to be doing Dredd in the future. They're going to have to get some new writers in. It's impossible for one person to write Dredd exclusively for two years *and* keep up the quality. It was quite a pressure for the 2½ years I was doing it.

"Working on *Hellblazer* I know Steve's going to be drawing every issue and I get to see the art and check all the spelling for corrections. Stuart Moore is a great editor because he discusses everything. He doesn't tread on my territory and I don't tread on his. It's really a perfect partnership at the minute.

"With Fleetway it just isn't that ideal: they've got to get *2000AD* out every week, but at the end of the day, if they make changes to the script for instance – and they're usually the wrong ones – it's still my name on the credit box. But when I'd done a good Dredd script and I'd got a good artist on it and everything worked right, and that *did* happen a lot of times, then I was really happy because Dredd's one of my favourite characters.

"It's great fun to write, it's just a shame that it can't be a perfect situation all the time."

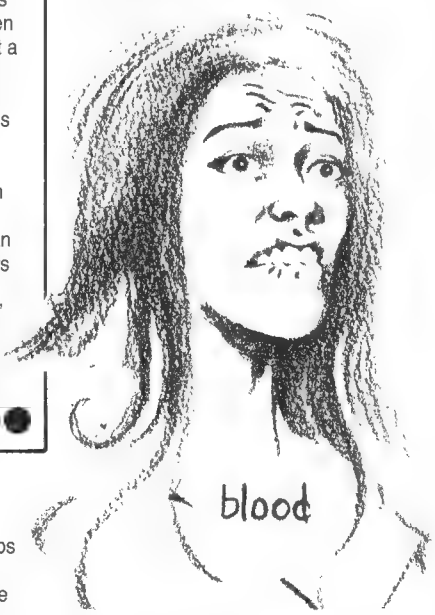
Yeah, well, after this is read you can be sure Fleetway won't be short of offers – which is kinda where we came in – however, one has to be concerned, cos' up and coming writers of Garth Ennis' calibre are far and few between these days. CW

and the creative team have chosen Stuart Chaifetz as regular man on the job.

In a futile attempt to return to sanity, I ask what's happening with Etrigan's supporting cast.

"We've got rid of Glenda and Rhandu and turned Jason Blood back into a cold-hearted type of fellow, but we've kept Harry The Pillow, cos' he's good fun to draw, and The Thing That Never Dies. We've also got rid of Katrina, the other pillow – she went and fell in love with Rhandu's couch or something like that." Mr. McCrea tells me all this perfectly sober I might add.

"If you remember in one issue of Etrigan was on Yo!-MTV-Raps with the baseball cap on and all that: we're bringing him back like that for one issue because Garth and I are both into rap music. It's a good excuse for uzies, street violence, and big shoes . . . plus of course Etrigan talks in rhyme."



Ironically *The Demon* wasn't his original commission from DC, but *Streets #3*.

"I'm dealing with Archie Goodwin who's another nice man to work with, especially since I've taken so long with it. Andrew Chiu's helping me to paint it. Originally I was supposed to start it 7–8 months before I actually did, but due to various things going on so long I needed help. Why did I accept 48 fully-coloured pages? Because I thought, 'God! Here's DC wanting to give me work! Great!' So I took it.

"*Streets* has been changed a bit since it was first written. There were certain sequences in it that were like tour guides of Hollywood." Go on. "There was a big splash of Sunset Boulevard with limousines going up and down it, which is a helluva kind of shot to do even if you had the reference for it, but we never actually got the reference for it, and try as I might I could find nothing on Sunset Boulevard, certainly not with any limos in it." I wouldn't have thought it the brightest of ideas, writing such a script for a man who's spent most of his life in Northern Ireland and now resides in the West Midlands. Would you?

Deadline are currently publishing the 6 episodes of *Bottom of the Box* written by former editor Si Spencer, which John presumably drew whilst waiting for *Streets* to get the go ahead.

"That's completely different, I don't want to describe this badly and have Si rattling my cage but it's a sort of psychological thriller using lots of S & M, and drug abuse. There 's no nudity as such, we've been very careful on that. I've done it in pastels and conte crayons, it's more *film noir*, with cast shadows and half-lit faces. I find working like that very easygoing, I can produce a page very quickly and have it looking good.

"The reason I took on the work was because I like Frank Wynne; money didn't enter into it at all, and it seemed like a good story. And, again, you could experiment.

"My work borders on the cartoony a lot and I'm still doing that with *The Demon*, that's great fun but it's not really pushing it that much, and it's what you can get away with. With *Deadline* you can get away with whatever you frigging want really." he jokes. "I don't know what it's going to print like because the artwork is really fragile. If you put your finger on it you get a big grey mark, I had to put hair spray and fix stuff on it, but it still wouldn't stick so it's going to be interesting.

"Warren Ellis said, 'I'm writing this as a showcase for your artwork' which is quite a nice thing for one fellow to say about another," John comments on a *Legends of the Dark Knight* two parter. "I'm looking forward to doing that, it sounds like a good laugh. I'll being doing it in conjunction with *The Demon* so hopefully there'll be no deadlines. There are also a couple of things in the pipeline for Vertigo." Ah, Dick Foreman mentioned something. "The one with Dick has a bit of a plot synopsis floating about, the word zoology springs to mind . . . but that's not gonna clue you in!"

He lies back on the settee, a man who claims to "hate" each piece of work as soon as he's drawn it, but content for the moment, knowing he's giving it his all as he concludes: "There's things afoot. I've sold my soul to the DC devil!" CW

Hellblazer, Demon, Goddess © DC Comics

Bottom of the Box © Si Spencer/John McCrea

him! They were the most complicated things to draw ever, with big manes of hair, lots of spinal columns, individual ribs and all these guts hanging out everywhere. After I'd drawn one of those guys I'd draw a face and start to put in these extra lines. I found myself catching myself and saying, 'Hold on!', then getting the Tipp-Ex out because you don't really need all those lines, they're pointless. I'm not one for overdoing it, I know some people who put in so many lines they'll never finish a job." The fact is most of it doesn't reproduce in print anyway.

When John and I conclude a thirty minute discussion about colouring, neither of us has the foggiest how the conversation drifted. All you need to know is that David Lloyd coloured #40, which John was "really pleased about,"

HA HA HA

Demon

IS GLENN FABRY THE BEST COMIC STRIP ARTIST IN THE WORLD? TEN YEARS AGO THAT'S WHAT HE WAS AIMING TO BE, BUT HOW CLOSE HE'S GOT TO THE TOP YOU'LL SEE WHEN SLAINE RETURNS TO 2000AD

When Glenn lived in Shepperton it was in a sprawl of half-finished pencilled pages, some partly-inked, incomplete paintings, Special Brew, Neighbours *on the tv and long-forgotten deadlines everywhere. That was, when? Five, six years ago? He was working up pages for a new Pat Mills strip,* Witch, *that was supposed to be coming out from Epic. And we waited, and waited...*

And waited because this was Glenn's big break in the States, the first time we were going to see an extended run of work in fully painted colour, and Glenn was the shit hot artist in the UK at the time. *He was slow, sure, but you didn't mind the quantity when the quality was so high.*

It took five years for Glenn to break in the USA, and if you've only known his work on covers for the likes of Hellblazer, Lobo: Portrait of a Victim, Vengeance of Bane *and* Vertigo Jam *(or, far, far worse, the Quality Comics reprints of Slaine where the pages were stretched out of all shape), you're in for a treat when you see 'Slaine: Demon Killer' in* 2000AD, *because it's going to blow you away.*

I HAD TO PULL MY SOCKS UP AND REALLY START TO COMPETE ON ANOTHER LEVEL

When we talked recently he was facing the ultimate deadline: two days away from the altar, suffering from a trip into the South Coast clubland with Messrs. Hewlett and Bond, and as excited as a puppy in his first snowdrift. But you don't want to know about artists doing responsible things like getting married, sipping red wine and actually meeting deadlines (well, some; they're all pinned to the mirror so he can't avoid them). You want debauched, drunken, out-of-your-face anecdotes that prove that every comic creator is a weird, tortured genius, right? Alright, but just one anecdote, and we'll save it for later.

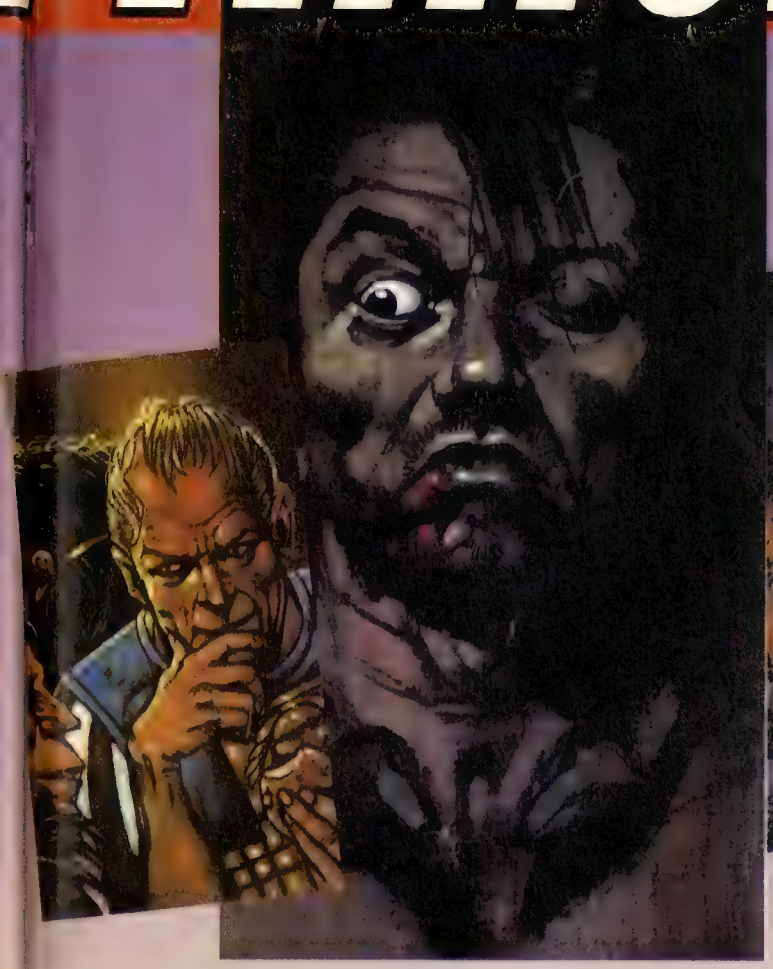
Back in his teens, Glenn had produced a fanzine called *Working Klass Superhero* with some friends from college as an end-of-term project, printing 500 copies which were sold through Dark They Were and Golden Eyed and Forbidden Planet. It sold out and a second issue, with a 1000 copy run, followed.

"It was quite strange the amount of people who remember my stuff from that," Glenn recalls. "I met Brian Bolland and Bryan Talbot, and Dave Gibbons, and they were really complimentary. Bryan liked it and commissioned me to do a ten page strip for *Near Myths*, but the magazine folded on the issue that my stuff was going to appear in. I never got paid for it.

"After that I went to *'Pssst!* magazine and did a strip for them, but that folded. When I heard, I went out of the offices and into town, and there was a graphics exhibition. Bryan Talbot was sitting on a table doing a record cover or something, so I went up to him and said 'My name's Glenn Fabry. Where's my money!'."

At Bryan's suggestion he submitted some samples to Pat Mills, who was looking for a new artist for Slaine. "I did 3 or 4 drawings of the character, and about 2 weeks later I had the job." Glenn's first Slaine appeared in 1984, alternating with episodes by David Pugh. This was highly rendered black and white, with a couple of pages coloured up for back covers, and a couple of front covers, and despite only doing some two dozen episodes, the strip was his, and that's no slight on David Pugh's work. But no-one was ever going to be that good again...we thought.

n Killer



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LOST DESTINY

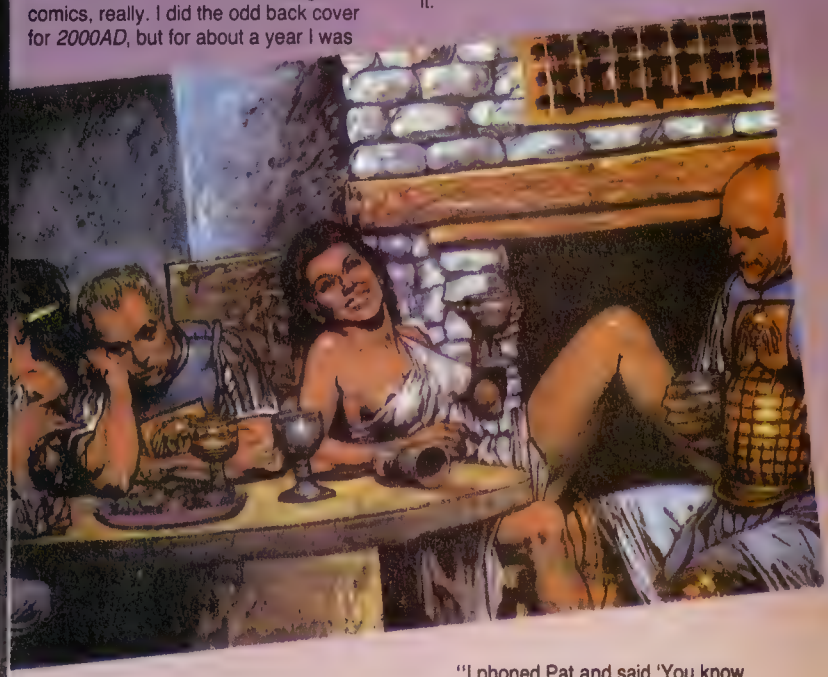
"Me and Pat had this offer to do *Witch* for Epic, but we really had difficulty with the contract. The dollar exchange rate was particularly bad for people working in pounds, and they sent this massive contract which was 98% about film rights and 2% about comics. Epic were owned by New World Pictures at the time, and if I'd signed I would have been getting something like £90 a fully painted page. They wrote another contract, but it took them about a year to get around to it.

"In that time I wasn't working in comics, really. I did the odd back cover for *2000AD*, but for about a year I was doing advertising work and illustrations for magazines and doing paintings in off-license windows for crates of beer.

"I actually landed a job doing designs for a Hollywood movie which will probably never be made. It was called *Lost Destiny* and was basically a punk reworking of Greek legend, along the lines of *Clash of the Titans* with Laurence Olivier and Harry Hamlin in it, the Ray Harryhausen one. Bob Bierman was going to be the director – he did *Vampire's Kiss* with Nicholas Cage – and if they'd made it, it would have cost more than *Terminator II* because there were special effects on every page of the script, monsters turning into robots with hundred foot necks, and all sorts of stuff.

"I did a series of 10 paintings over a 10-day period and it got me six grand, which was really cool, because for ages I'd been talking about moving from my home town after I broke up with my girlfriend.

"I had a phonecall from Dan Chichester, who was going to be editing *Witch*, the day I was due to move; he hadn't seen anything from me in ages – I think I'd done about 6 pages and a cover. I told him 'I'm going down to a town where nobody knows me, and I'll live like a hermit and work exclusively on it, and it'll be wonderful,' but he told me to forget it.



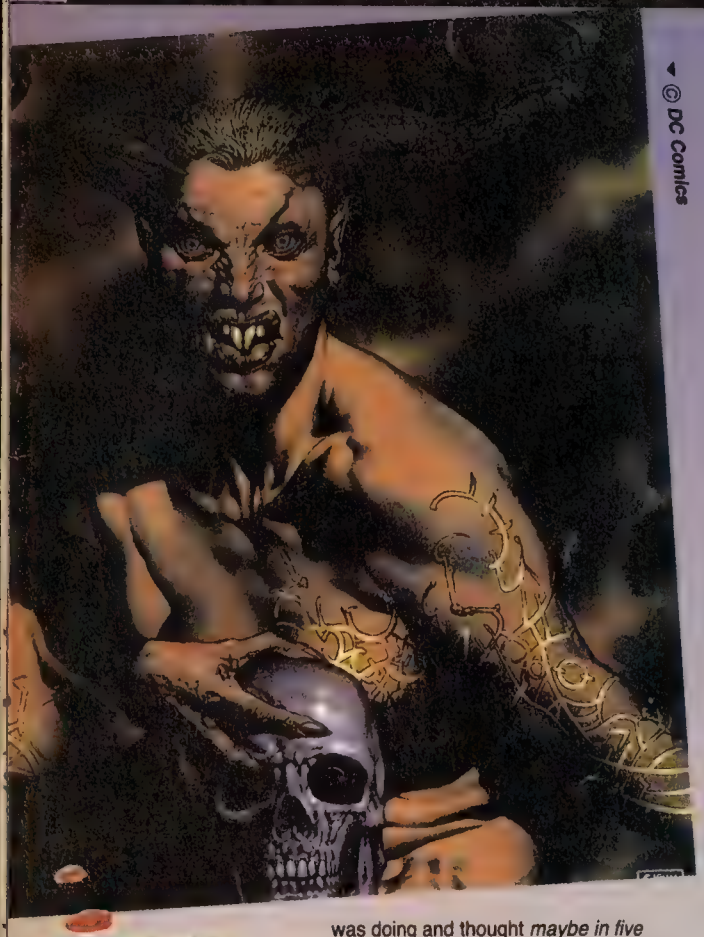
"I phoned Pat and said 'You know that book we were going to do for Epic. Well, I'm not going to do it any more – I've just been told to f*ck off'. And Pat asked me if I fancied doing Slaine again."

FIVE YEAR PLAN

In between the old Slaine the King and the new Slaine the Demon Killer, the strip was taken over by Simon Bisley. What did Glenn think of his work on 'The Horned God'?

"Well...for a long time, when I first started working in comics, I'd given myself a timetable: I looked at the work I

Slaine © Fleetway Editions



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I KEEP GETTING ON TRAINS AND EXPECTING TO HAVE FLASH-BACKS

was doing and thought *maybe in five years I'll be on a par Brian Bolland and Dave Gibbons*, those kind of people. And then Simon came along and all that got blown up in the air.

"I met Simon at a signing for the *Comic Book Price Guide* in London at a table with Dave Gibbons. Simon asked me if I wanted to look at some of his Slaine stuff and it was really shit hot. I looked and Dave and said 'He's pretty good, isn't he'. And Dave said 'Well, he's better than you'." (That's roughly the way I remember it, too, being sat to Dave's right at the same signing. And if my memory serves me right, it was the only time Glenn took off his shades. He looked haunted.)

"I though *No! No! Nobody's better than me!*. Basically, I had to pull my socks up and really start to compete on another level. A few people rate me, and obviously a lot of people rate Simon, but I think we might be around the same level now..."

Comparisons are bound to be made, which Glenn is taking in his stride. It's going to get worse when Glenn takes over *Judgement on Gotham*. He laughs when I suggest he might be looked on as a post-Bisley Brit painter.

"Yeah, it's a bit weird really. I've got the scripts through, and originally it was going to be *Judgement on Gotham 2*, but Fleetway wanted somebody they could be more sure of getting everything done on time, so they got Cam Kennedy in. What was going to be book two is now going to be books three and four. I still haven't actually finished the whole of Slaine yet. I'm doing the first seven episodes, and I think Greg Staples is taking over the book after me. I'm going to have to sort out the last episodes when I get back from my honeymoon.

"My big problem at the moment is not having enough time to work on all the things I want to finish to the degree I want to do them. What with getting married I've had to take on more stuff than I would normally, and there's a fair amount being pushed through. When I get back I hope I can get on a more even keel. *Judgement on Gotham* is going to be the best thing I've ever done."

Glenn's a perfectionist, and not simply – and notoriously – slow, although he's that as well. A page or a cover can be painted in anything from a day to a week. "If you see a good page it's probably one I've spent a week on, but if you see a page I've only spent three days on...well, it should stand up in the light of day. But if it's a heap of old shite its because I only had 18 hours to do it, haven't had any sleep, and just slaved over it to get it done." There's also the eternal problem of having to rework people's arses to make them acceptable...but that's a different tale entirely.

The covers are generally picked from 5 or 6 rough images Glenn takes from the script. "It's quite difficult coming up with ideas for *Hellblazer*. Not that I don't reckon its really well written, because it is, but quite a lot of it is just people hanging around talking, which doesn't make for the most scintillating cover in the world. They generally have a big set piece – a mega-violent sequence – but I can't really do that because it would be like giving away the punch-line of a joke on the cover before you get to read it, so I have to be a bit selective with the images I can choose."

Glenn's champion in the USA was *Hellblazer* writer Garth Ennis. "Garth really campaigned with the people at DC for me to do the covers. Originally I was only marked down to do four covers, but after the second I had a phonecall from Stuart Moore, the editor, saying I could do the job as long as I like. I'm sticking with it because it's a pretty cool gig to have."

THE TWILIGHT ZONE

Garth was partly responsible for a hole in Fabry's CV...well, he wasn't around when we were talking, so he gets the blame. "Maybe I shouldn't mention it, but I, um, fell out of a moving train last year which is why I'm having problems with deadlines. For six months I had to work with a cast on my arm.

"I'd gone up to see Garth in town because we were going to talk about me taking over the covers. We met in a pub, as you do, and I can remember waving goodbye to him outside the pub and getting on the train at Victoria, and after that I can remember opening my eyes, being wheeled down a corridor, covered in blood." Another comic legend is born...

"Well, they operated on me, and they wouldn't have been able to if I'd had excess amounts of alcohol in my bloodstream, but to be honest I can't remember a thing about it at all. I keep getting on trains and expecting to have flashbacks, like they do in American tv movies when Cheryl Ladd opens the door and looks down, and the pearl-engraved handle is just like the one her mother used to have and it all comes flooding back.

"But, so far, nothing. I'm just on a train, being bored. But I don't stand quite so close to the doors. They've actually started putting messages on them: 'Do Not Lean on the Doors', but there's no way I can get any money back from British Rail, because they've got a rule that if you've had more than a half of shandy when you get on a train you're trying to commit suicide. There was a documentary about it on ITV which I didn't watch because people kept phoning up to tell me it was on. I saw the titles at the end."

DEMON KNIVES

Er, so what's Slaine about then?

"Slaine gets killed off at the beginning. He's done his 7 years of looking after the tribe, and been bored all the way through it because everything has been wonderful for all the tribesmen. So they kill him and chuck him on a funeral pyre. And this goddess shows up and says *(you have to put on a sort of goddess voice to get the full effect – Steve)* 'In the future...terrible trouble with a bunch of awful people coming along making a shit of everything...we need his warlike spirit.'

"So they chuck him in the Cauldron of Rebirth, and Ukko jumps in after him, and he shows up in Roman times where he goes around flexing his muscles and killing loads of Romans with a mad grin on his face.

"It's some of the best work I've done – some panels I actually spent a week on, much to the frustration of the editors. I've always liked Slaine and I think I always will. I've got a kind of paternal feeling about the character despite the fact that I didn't come up with him or anything, that was Pat's idea, but it was my first big break and I must admit I was a bit jealous of Simon when he took over and took it to these immense new heights.

"What he was doing with the character wasn't really the way I saw Slaine, so its great to get the chance to

Art © Fleetway, DC Comics

put a bit more of my ten pence worth in."

Having spent so long on the character, and being so close to it, Glenn has, he confesses, become more knowledgeable on Celtic lore, but not enough to become a Celtic bore: "I've got a certain amount of reference," he admits, "but all the research is done by Pat, really. There was one thing that was quite odd – in 'Slaine the King' there's a sequence where Slaine is being covered in paint before meeting the Goddess towards the end of the book, and there's a picture of him with his arms outstretched, with all these weird tattoos all over him, and a large bunch of mistletoe covering up his genitalia. The week after I'd finished it, my brother brings round a book of Celtic design and one of the illustrations of the Celtic warriors in there has exactly the same tattoos I'd made up for Slaine."

Spooky, isn't it?

WHEN I WAS FIVE...

With Greg Staples taking over Slaine, and the honeymoon over by the time you read this, Glenn is planning to devote his time to the upcoming *Judgement on Gotham 3*, plus covers for John Smith's *Scarab*. "I'm only doing the first few of those," he says. "I'm following in Simon's footsteps again and doing the cover for the trade paperback of *Lobo's Back*. I might be doing some book covers as well, but apart from that it'll be Batman.

"It's a childhood dream come true! When I was a little kid, when I was about five and going to art classes in school, I'd draw Batman in everything: they'd ask me to do a picture of Mum and Dad in front of our house and I'd do Batman beating them up. If I did a picture of a tree, Batman would be hiding in it. So it really is a childhood dream come true.

"If I do Batman and he turns out alright, the only ones I've got left now from childhood dreams would be Howard the Duck." He starts going all misty-eyed. "A fully painted Howard the Duck graphic novel with Spider-Man guest starring. When I was 14, Howard the Duck was my all-time favourite comic in the history of the planet!"

The choice seems a bit out of kilter with the ultra realism and violence of his painted work on Slaine, but you have to understand Glenn's sense of humour – and there's a lot of humour in his work. When he has time to read comics, which isn't often, you'll find him curled up with a copy of *Groo* or *The Mighty Magnor*. How come he's not tried his hand at humour?

"I'm just a commercial artist, you know? I do what I'm asked to do, and just try to do the best job I can." Does that mean the five-year plan to be the best in the world is still urging him on?

"Well, I don't know...when you're twelve you know you're going to be the best in the world, but when you're thirty-two you just sit back and think *Well, I'm just going to be the best I can possibly be.*

"No, f*ck that. I still want to be the best artist in the world, and the good thing about art is that its something you can always get better at. I mean, Salvador Dali was miles better at the age of 80 than he was at 30. Who knows, by the time I reach 80...I'll probably end up falling out of another train. Or a train will fall on me."

SOME PANELS I ACTUALLY SPENT A WEEK ON, MUCH TO THE FRUSTRATION OF THE EDITOR

◀ DC Comics

Art © Glenn Fabry

GLENN FABRY STRIPOGRAPHY

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Slaine (by Pat Mills):
Time Killer (in *2000AD 411-412,419-421,427-428,431*, 30 Mar-6 Apr 1985, 25 May-8 Jun 1985, 20 Jul-27 Jul 1985, 17 Aug 1985. Inks by Bryan Talbot 431)
Tomb of Terror (in *2000AD 447-448,458-460*, 7 Dec-14 Dec 1985, 22 Feb-8 Mar 1986)
The Devil's Banquet (in *2000AD Sci-Fi Special*, Sum 1986)
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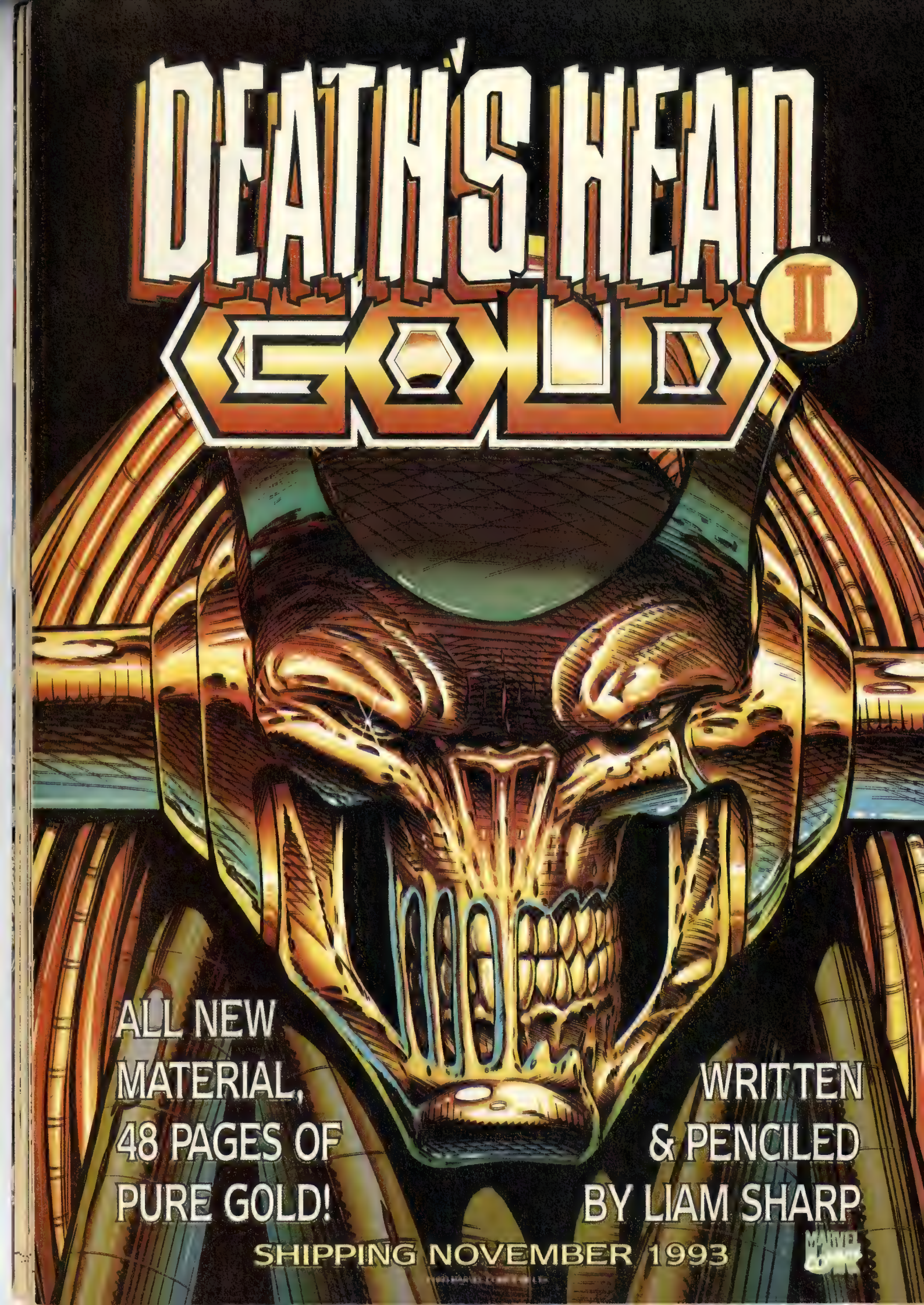
Scatha (in *News on Sunday 1-6,8*, 26 Apr-31 May 1987, 14 Jun 1987, by Pat Mills)
Tharg's Future Shocks (in *2000AD 567*, 26 Mar 1988, by Chris Smith)
Portrait of the Artist as a Psychopathic Bankrupt (in *Heartbreak Hotel 3*, Apr/May 1988, by GF)
Judge Dredd:
The Sage (in *2000AD 577*, 4 Jun 1988, by John Wagner/Alan Grant)
(The Power of the Gods) (in *2000AD 600*, 12 Nov 1988, by Alan Grant)
Talkback (in *2000AD 740*, 20 Jul 1991, by Garth Ennis; reprinted in *Rock Power*, Jan 1992)
Brick Top (in *A1 #1-6a*, May 1989-Mar 1992, by Chris Smith)
A Day in the Life (in *Crisis 39*, 3 Mar 1990, by Igor Goldkind)
Loveboy Loves Lovegirl (in *Deadline*, Jun 1990, by Brett Ewins)
Waltz (in *Revolver 3*, Sep 1990, by Tony Salmons)
Prisoner of Justice (in *Crisis 52*, Nov 1990, by Alan Mitchell)
The One I Love (in *Revolver Romance Special*, Mar 1991, by Garth Ennis)
Along For the Ride (in *A1 #1*, Oct 1992, by Igor Goldkind)

Note: Not included are Glenn's countless covers, including an extended run on *Hellblazer*, and numerous one-offs for *2000AD*, *Deadline*, *Crisis*, *A1*, *Vengeance of Bane*, *Lobo: Portrait of a Victim*, *Vertigo Jam*, *Lobo's Back* (graphic novel), computer magazines etc.


DEATH'S HEAD II
GOLD
ALL NEW MATERIAL, 48 PAGES OF PURE GOLD!
WRITTEN & PENCILED BY LIAM SHARP
SHIPPING NOVEMBER 1993
MARVEL COMICS

WHEN THE **DEATH'S HEAD II** MINI-SERIES APPEARED IN 1991, IT CATAPULTED ITS ARTIST INTO THE HARSH GLARE OF PUBLIC ACCLAIM, AND LIAM SHARP BECAME WIDELY RECOGNISED AS A HOT TALENT. HIS LATEST PROJECT, **BLOODSEED**, IS ON THE RACKS NOW AND HE'S ABOUT TO RETURN TO THE CYBORG WHO ENDS EVERY SENTENCE WITH A QUESTION, YES?

Blood and Death

In company, there's a tendency to try not to sound too egotistical. Liam Sharp peppers his conversation with phrases like "it's pretty good" and "I'm quite pleased with it". Alone, he may have allowed his enthusiasm a little more rein and match some of the praise that has come his way in the past two years for his work on Death's Head II. *"Awesome" is a phrase rapidly becoming overused by fans of his artwork.*

"I'm doing an interview here, so if it sounds a bit bizarre and self-righteous, I'm not just babbling," says Liam to his fellow workers. There's an indecipherable response. All I hear is the reply: "But I always give interviews in the nude."

Naked and sweating, the Bullpen toil relentlessly in the basement of Marvel UK's London HQ, so they would have me believe. This is as live as you're going to get off the printed page.

Sharp has youth on his side as well as talent: at 25 he's already been through one rise and fall in his career, although he's one of the few people whom you could honestly say started on the crest of the wave. At nine he was already a

Art © Marvel Comics Ltd

frustrated artist - frustrated by the inch thick brushes and powder paints he was using at school when at home he had oils and freedom to let his imagination take over. His flair didn't go unnoticed by his parents and, via the Gifted Children's Society, he secured an art scholarship to a Prep school in Eastbourne: "That was my first major break - the first of its kind as well. They have an art scholar every year now, so its a bit of a legacy.

"What I didn't realise was that all the time my parents were saying 'Don't stop him doing comics. That's what he wants to do.' They were behind me all the time, although I didn't know about it until a year ago. Usually in art they try to push you into painting sheep and landscapes and things you can see, which wasn't really up my street. You can sit in a field if you want to see sheep, but if you can paint a dragon and convince someone that's what a dragon looks like, you're onto a winner."

Unaware of the existence of comic fandom, Sharp drew his inspiration from *Star Wars*, European artists like Philip Druillet, and galaxy-spanning Marvel titles by Jim Starlin and John Byrne. The other big influence was the classic *Look and Learn* epic, 'The Trigan Empire', painted by Don Lawrence. "That just blew me away," he says. "I was very lucky when I later met Lawrence and worked in his studio."

The meeting, through a mutual friend of Sharpe's godfather, led to a three week stint during the summer holidays, and an invitation to return once he'd completed his A-levels. "It was actually a lot of pressure off because I thought I could just spend the rest of my life drawing *Storm* with Don. I think it made them easier to pass.

"I spent a year with Don, the idea being that I took over *Storm*, but at the end of the day he decided he loved doing it and didn't want to let it go, and I didn't want to spend my life being a clone of someone else, so we went our separate ways.

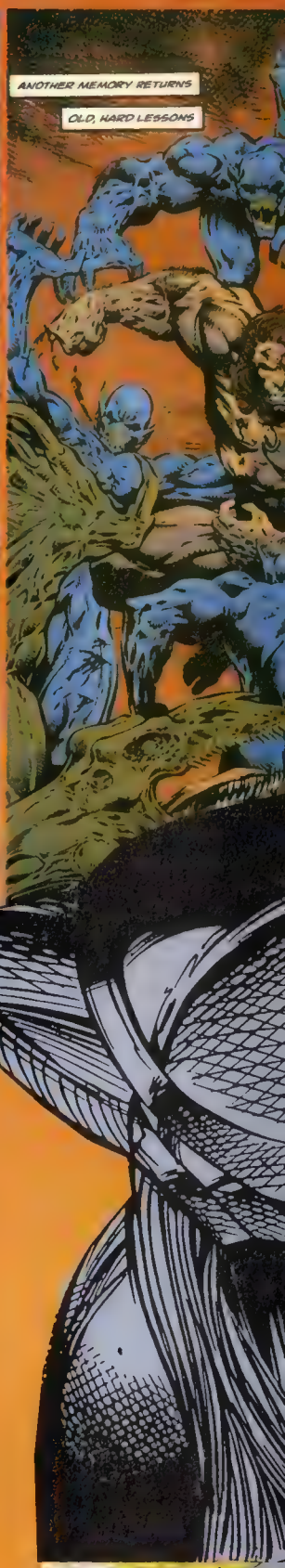
"But it was because of that I got the chance to phone up *2000AD* and say 'Well, I've been working with Don Lawrence', and they pretty much just offered me a Future Shock straight away."

I CREATED A MONSTER

Sharp became a regular on Judge Dredd for two years, but didn't, as you might expect, carry the ghost of Lawrence with him into the strip: "I think I drew in every style you can conceivably imagine. I didn't do one strip remotely resembling another one. I was getting influences from people like Moebius, all the way to John Higgins, a bit of Don in some places, Brian Bolland in other places. I was drawing my inspiration from a very broad spectrum - later on there was some Bisley and Glenn Fabry too."

In 1988 Sharp published his first strip with Marvel UK ("Yeh, the Galaxy Rangers. A milestone. Not!"), and filled in on a character that would later make his name. It couldn't be anyone else but Death's Head.

I WANT IT BACK
AND WITH THAT CERTAINTY COMES FRESH CONVICTION
FRESH STRENGTH
I MUST RETRACE MY FOOTSTEPS THROUGH THE ICY PLAINS
RECLAIM MY BIRTHRIGHT MY KINGDOM, MY...
THERE IS A SUDDEN RUSH OF AIR
HEAT, UNEXPECTED AND DISORIENTATING
HRAN NATH TARRH!
THE WORDS MEAN NOTHING
BUT THE INTENT...
I UNDERSTAND THE INTENT
NO



"That was the first series. It was just a fill-in for Bryan Hitch who was doing most of them at the time. At the time they had a very tight rein on how we had to draw the characters, nowhere near the freedom we had when I returned to do the new stuff. But it was good fun."

DOWN

His steady rise was dealt a crashing blow, and the next year was anything but fun: "I went up to Derbyshire and bought a house, and basically lost twenty-five grand. It was a terrible time. I was trying desperately to do a 4-part 'Third World War' story for *Crisis*, but I was taking so long that by the time I was two-thirds of the way it the magazine folded, and that was me stuffed.

"I didn't work for a whole year after that. I thought 'I'm obviously no good at comics, nobody is remotely interested in what I do'.

"I came back to London fully intending to go to film school in Bournmouth - I got myself a place and everything - but in the meantime I needed to get some work to carry me through. I tried everywhere for a couple of months in London, all the design industries, but there was no work for anyone in the middle of the recession, and I wasn't really looking very hard. I don't think my heart was in it."

His second break came when Dan Abnett left Marvel. Sharp went to his leaving party and met Paul Neary who was taking over, and - with John Freeman - he began working up a character. It failed to click. "It fell through, but Paul had seen what I was doing and showed me Death's Head."

At the time Death's Head was undergoing a complete revamp, but all was not going well. Advance orders were around 30,000 and the character obviously wasn't going to make any splash in the market. Neary canned the new series and came up with his own rough design for a more market friendly cyborg which, according to Liam, "looked like an insect. I went home, thinking about it on the way back, and did a sketch, faxed it back on a friend's fax machine, and got a call the next day saying 'Can we use it?'."

A few weeks later he was invited to pencil the first *Death's Head II* mini-series. "They sent in the design to States and the sales figures jumped to 90,000, which really made us sit up. The American's spotted it as well and stuck Death's Head II in the 'Big Guns' promotion, and by the time it came out the first issue had orders of 200,000, sold out completely, and they had to do a special reprint - another 50,000 with a metallic cover.

"It was just incredible for all of us, amazing to think that he's gone into the

THE JOY OF BATTLE AND VICTORY ON MANY FIELDS, IN MANY ARENAS
I CHERISH THE PAIN, IT IS SOMETHING FAMILIAR AT LAST.
THE ODDS ARE CRAZY... THIS, TOO, I AM USED TO.
THE DEMONS TURN THEIR ATTENTION TO ME.
I HEAR A MUTTERING IN MY MIND
IT COMES FROM THE BIRD THING
I HAVE SOMETHING TO LEARN FROM IT, I KNOW
BUT FIRST, THERE IS DESTRUCTION TO BE DONE...
CROSS CONAN WITH STAR WARS AND YOU GET SOMETHING ALONG THE LINES OF BLOODSEED
X-TREME PREJUDICE!
SHARP & NEARY
X-MEN

mainstream and stuck." Part of that success, particularly in the UK, is because of an element of British comics in the design: "It wouldn't look out of place in *2000AD*," Liam believes, "but we were rendering it in a way that was very American. I don't think he looks anything like any American characters. He's very unique. I think I just struck lucky with the design - I did something that just worked. You can never explain *why* something works, but its a good feeling."

Mention of the rendering of the original series brings some derisory commentary from series inker, Andy Lanning. "It's all down to Andy," admits Sharp. "It wouldn't have been a success and he had to save every page."

A scuffle breaks out...No, only kidding. They're the best of friends really. Working in the basement art studio gives Sharp and the other Marvel UK Bullpenners a chance to bounce ideas off each other. "We have a good laugh. It's a good atmosphere, and to be honest I can't work at home - I'm done for if I try. I just can't get my head down."

The success of the mini-series led straight into an ongoing series, Sharp teaming up again with writer Dan Abnett for the first four issues which hit the ground running: the first issue sold 364,000 copies, which in cash terms is not to be sneezed at. Artistically, which is what we're more concerned with here, it was an even greater success than the first series, Liam freewheeling with the pencils and getting to grips with the rest of the X-Men - Death's Head had already met Wolverine in the mini-series - to grea effect. Not many characters can get away with lines like "Honey, I'm homicidal", and not many artists can draw bald, horned, torn-skull faced cyborgs with fluic metal arms and make them look anything but laughable. In *Death's Head II* you've got the combination that can and does.

Sharp's success at Marvel was confirmed at last year's San Diego Convention when he was invited to join Homage Studios, home of Marc Silvestri and Jim Lee. "I was invited to join Image and work with them, but at the time I'd only drawn 4 issues of Death's Head and I felt like I was only just beginning - and I also felt that if I turned my back on Paul a that stage it would have been extremely unfair because he had done me such a massive favour and turned everything around for me just by offering encouragement and offering me a lot of free rein to do what I wanted to do.

"Whether I do anything with them in the future is another thing. Let's see what the future offers."

BLOODSEED

The immediate future is mapped out already. After an inking assist on #5, Sharp has forsaken Death's Head temporarily and put his energies into *Bloodseed*, initially a two-part series for Marvel Frontier Comics. Co-created with Neary, Bloodseed taps into the long-ignored-by-comics barbarian genre - Bisley excepted. "*Bloodseed* was a dream project," says Liam, "just something me and Paul were talking about because we shared the same views of the old Warren comics and barbarian-type strips."

If you delve back into Neary's history, you discover that in the early seventies he was one of the few British artists to contribute to James Warren's horror comics in the States, amongst the stories the classic post-holocaust series 'Hunter'. Sharp's description adds a futuristic wasteland setting. "Cross Conan with *Star Wars* and you get something along the lines of *Bloodseed*. It's sort of techno-barbarian.

Bloodseed travels the wastelands trying to regain his old kingdom, but does not recognise the landscape he travels in. Weave in a genetic message, mutants and visions and you have something approaching the premise of the series. If you want more, go out and buy it.

"This is the first time I've scripted myself, so its been a good learning experience," Liam admits. "But I feel pretty confident about it now. Certainly on issue two we were getting our act together a lot more, and I'm looking forward to doing the next two issues next year.

"Neither of us expect any sales on this one because its a barbarian strip and there has been no market for barbarians for a long time. Its obviously a bit risky when you take a genre that's generally considered completely dead, so we're taking the risk and hope that people like it. I think its some of my best work ever. I'm very proud of it - we both are. Steve Whitaker has done a beautiful colour job and Cam Smith did some amazing inks, and Paul wrote a great story." And, before you ask, none of these guys are in the same room.

During the sabbatical, Simon Coleby had the task of taking over *Death's Head II*. "I liked the approach he used," Liam confesses. "He was going for big powerful figures. I think anyone who looks at Coleby's stuff will get an appreciation for the character they might not have otherwise had". The regular series is now in the hands of slick new Spaniard, Sal Larocca, although Sharp will add his pen to the monthly with a 4-page prologue introducing the latest Death's Head title, the quarterly *Death's Head Gold*, the first issue (due November) to be penned, pencilled and wrapped by Sharp.

With 64 pages to play in, what has he got lined up for the crazed 'borg?

"I always felt that he was so powerful that he didn't really seem to be going through too much of a hard time, and I wanted to knock him down a few pegs. By the time I get my hands on him he in quite a bad shape."

> I ALWAYS FELT THAT HE WAS SO POWERFUL

G'wan, tell the truth. You just want to see him suffer, eh?

"Yeh. He's had it too easy, the old bugger. I've stripped him right down to six operating personalities, his fluid metal arm isn't working at all - it's just a hand - and he's got all sorts of attachments to keep his legs moving, one of his eyes is blasted out, and he's only got one horn. He's not feeling too good.

"When I started writing I thought 'I'm going to write it as serious as I can, and really make him suffer. He's going to get all moody and dark'. But when you get to writing dialogue for Death's Head there's just no way you can make him like that. He's such a flippant bastard he just takes over and writers himself. You're thinking 'You bastard, I was going to make you really heavy duty and nasty and you're quipping again'. He does it on purpose. I created a monster!

"Its been really good fun writing it, and I just hope it goes down well with the public. It's nice to get some of the ideas off your chest. We're going to do issue two as well, and Andy's doing some bloody good inks - and, yes, he's in the room. He's saving it again." The Liam Sharp interview risks grinding to a halt again as we argue the possibility of including Lanning's name on the credits, maybe in small letters. That's cool, we agree. All I have to do is make sure to ge the 'Liam Sharp' embossed.

There's a snag in producing a popular character: Death's Head II is making so many guest appearances that he's in danger of overkill, admits Sharp. "I just hope that by the time *Death's Head Gold* appears people won't be too

AUGUST 1993...

SUPERMAN AND BATMAN REACHED MILLIONS OF ENTHUSIASTIC READERS

"'*Knightfall*' and '*Reign of the Supermen*' lived up to all expectations generated by DC's promotional campaigns, delivering solid storytelling and incredible sales!"

Steve Geppi, Diamond Comic Distributors, Inc.

"The death and return of Superman was the biggest story-driven event in the history of comics. The effect on the industry has been enormous, as new readers were drawn to comic book stores by the publicity found an entire new world of entertainment — the world of comics."

Milton Griepp, Capital City Distribution, Inc.

"... Superman and Batman have brought us many new repeat customers and established record-breaking sales for our store."

Bruce Webster and Mary Hilliard, Nostalgia Ink

"DC has shown the way for the rest of the industry to survive and to thrive."

Steve Milo, American Entertainment

"It's exciting to see comic books fans eager to read the next installment of a story again."

Cliff Biggers, *Comic Shop News*

"Your Superman titles are awesome. The breaking of a Bat was awesome too. When I grow up I want to be an artist and draw comic books."

Eric Luquette, Lafayette, LA

Thanks!

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sick of him. Just tell the readers that I'm giving him a good kicking."

With two issues of *Death's Head Gold* lined up, the second two-part book of *Bloodseed*, and a forthcoming *X-Men Unlimited* to look forward to, it's a busy time for Sharp. And to that you can add layouts for a two-issue revamp of Dragon's Claws. Giving 'em a couple of down-turned horns, Liam? "And a skull, and a changing arm and call them Dragon's Claws II. That would probably do the job."

The near future shouldn't see any risk of Sharp moving out of mainstream Marvel UK; why split a good partnership? And it is a good partnership that deserves a chance. "There's a lot of rubbish coming out at the moment," avers Sharp. "I just think it shouldn't shade people's perception of comics in general, because there's good stuff out there too. You just have to look for it, and base your opinions on your own likes and dislikes, not on what other people say.

"There's a really bad tendency to go along with a lot of the pretentious press about what is cool and what isn't. An awful lot of people will only read *Sandman* - which is perfectly wonderful in its own right - but its unfair to say that nothing else is good just because it isn't *Sandman*.

"I think its important that people get a perspective on things and don't just slag off comics because they're mainstream."

You see, comics don't have to be grim and gritty. There's plenty of fun left in good old blood and death. CW

Continued from page 33

LIAM SHARP STRIPOGRAPHY

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Thargs Future Shocks: (Someone is Watching Me) (in *2000AD 531*, 18 Jul 1987, by Alan McKenzie)
Judge Dredd:
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(Corporal Punishment) (in *2000AD 542*, 3 Oct 1987, by John Wagner/Alan Grant)
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A Power-House Pin-Up (back cover feature, in *Terrific, Fantastic*, 1967-1968)
(various splash pages) (in *Terrific, Fantastic*, 1967-1968)
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Daredevil (in *Daredevil 50-52*, Mar-May 1969, by Stan Lee 50, Roy Thomas 51-52, Gerry Conway 53. Inks by Johnny Craig 50,52, George Klein 51/ in *83*, Jan 1972, layouts for Alan Weiss/Bill Everett)
Nick Fury (in *Nick Fury Agent of SHIELD 12*, May 1969, by Steve Parkhouse. Inks by Sid Greene/BS)
The Avengers (in *The Avengers 66-67,98-100*, Jul-Aug 1969, Apr-Jun 1972, by Roy Thomas. Inks by Syd Shores 66, George Klein 67, Sal Buscema 98, Tom Sutton 99, Syd Shores/BS/Joe Sinnott 100)
The Terrible Old Man (in *Tower of Shadows 3*, Jan 1970, by Roy Thomas. Inks by Dan Adkins/John Verpoorten; reprinted in *Masters of Terror 1*, Jul 1975)
The Warlock Tree (in *Chamber of Darkness 3*, Feb 1970, by Gerry Conway. Inks by Syd Shores)
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The Demon That Devoured Hollywood (in *Tower of Shadows 5*, May 1970, by Roy Thomas. Inks by Dan Adkins)
The Scream of Things (in *Tower of Shadows 7*, Sep 1970, by Allyn Brodsky. Inks by Vince Colletta)
Tales of Hyperborea (in *Aspect 2*, 1970/ in *Orpheus 1*, Mar 1971)
Conan (based on the character created by Robert E. Howard; adapted by Roy Thomas):
(in *Conan the Barbarian 1-16,19-24*, Oct 1970-Jul 1972, Oct 1972-Mar 1973. Inks by Dan Adkins 1,19-20, Sal Buscema 2-4,6-7,9-11,13-15, Frank Giocoia 5, Tom Sutton/ Tom Palmer 8, Adkins/Buscema/Russell/Mayerik 21, Buscema/Adkins/Stone 23. Note 16 see *Savage Tales #1* below, 22 reprints *Conan the Barbarian #1*; episodes variously reprinted in *Conan the Barbarian Giant Size Special 1*, Sep 1973, in *Savage Tales featuring Conan 4*, Mar 1974, in *Savage Sword of Conan 1,82*, Aug 1974 etc, in *Giant Size Conan 1-5*, Sep 1974-1975, in *Savage Sword of Conan Special*, 1975, in *Marvel Treasury Edition 4,15,19*, 1975, 1977, 1978, in *Conan the Barbarian Pocket Book 1-6*, Sep 1980-Feb 1981, in *Robert E. Howard's Conan the Barbarian 1*, 1983, in *Conan Saga 1* et al, Jun 1987 etc)
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(portfolio, 6 plates) (in *Excalibur!*, 1978)(portfolio, 4 plates) (in *Sibyla*, 1979)
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Sceptor's Web/Revenge (in *Epic Illustrated 34*, Feb 1986. Extracts from two unfinished strips)
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Deathmate (in *Deathmate: Prologue*, Sep 1993, by Bob Layton. Inks by Jim Lee)
Rune (forthcoming, 1993)

With thanks to David Roach for his help in compiling the above stripography and article.

*OVER THE NEXT COUPLE OF MONTHS, WE TURN OUR ATTENTION TO THE ARTISTIC HALF OF THE COMIC CREATOR TEAM WITH HELP FROM RON TINER. AS AN ARTIST, RON HAS WORKED FOR MOST OF THE MAJOR BRITISH COMIC PUBLISHERS, INCLUDING WORK FOR **2000AD**, SPENT A PERIOD ON DC'S **HELLBLAZER**, HAS DRAWN COUNTLESS ILLUSTRATIONS FOR BOOKS, AND PENNED THE THARG RECOMMENDED **FIGURE DRAWING WITHOUT A MODEL**.*

MOVING PICTURES

When you first approach the job of drawing comics, the problems look pretty small really, don't they? The writer provides you with a script which contains a frame-by-frame breakdown of the story and a precise description of what each frame must show. As long as you can draw, the job is really straightforward. If you've read How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way, *you've probably made a mental note to draw all the characters with little heads and big feet, but apart from that, you just have to draw what you're told and that's all there is to it. Bespoke art. Made to measure. Simple, isn't it?*

Well, the answer to that is, as with most leading questions about life, the universe and everything, yes and no. The modern comic book is quite a sophisticated item, and the manner in which its creators use the wide range of techniques and methods available to them can have a profound effect on the way their story is experienced by the reader. The artist's line style, his use of varying frame size, dramatic light and shade, close-ups, up- and down-shots all affect the value judgements the reader makes about the incidents portrayed in the story and, ultimately, can alter the meaning of the piece. Indeed, the best artwork in modern comics packs an emotional punch that can render a simple tale thought-provoking and memorable by calling into play a whole range of sentiments regarding the human condition.

To clarify what I mean, look at the contrasting pages in figure 1. In the first, Frank Miller wallows salaciously in the flying blood and guts of scenes of violence, where clothing, limbs and entails are all seen as decorative items to enhance the choreography of the dynamic, radiating composition. In the page by David Mazzuccelli, real people are shown feeling real pain through a restrained and realistic depiction of a fight scene. The feelings the reader experiences regarding the story and the characters are, in each case, very different. Where, in the first, there is excitement and brutality, in the the second there is a perception of what violence means in the real world for ordinary, flesh and blood human beings.

I'm not trying to suggest here that one is necessarily better than the other (discussion of that question belongs elsewhere), but simply to point out the power the artist has to manipulate the reader's perceptions. He can greatly enhance and add depth to the writing, or blandly diminish its effect; or even, if he's feeling mischievous, actually change its meaning – I remember Harvey Kurtzman's comics adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's poem, 'The Raven', in which he surreptitiously added, in an early frame, a small dog eating from a dish labelled 'Giant Size Dog Food'. With no mention of it in the text, the dog is shown in consecutive frames, getting bigger and bigger, until the main action of the poem has to be carried on in a cramped corner of the room. This is a somewhat extreme example, but I hope it makes my point.

On the comic-book page the artist rules supreme. He wields a lot of power, but along with that power goes responsibility. Dave Gibbons has suggested that it's like a contract with the reader. Artists can become self-indulgent, filling every page with beautifully-rendered faces, or close-ups of ridiculously muscled leviathans just because that's what they find most

Art © respective copyright holders

Figure 1

▲ *Frank Miller*

▲ *Dave Mazzuccelli*

enjoyable to do. In this way they break their contract with the reader (and the writer, too) and turn their comics into showy portfolios which, though they can be a lot of fun, don't function effectively as comic books.

As a general rule then, the artist should see himself as the servant of both the writer and the reader. He is responsible for the final version of the story as it is presented to the reader. In doing so he has to be able to put himself in the reader's place, knowing what visual information he must have at each step and presenting it in such a way that the story is meaningful.

THE ARTIST AS CAMERA

In *A History of Comic Strip* by Pierre Couperie & Maurice Horn, Claude Moliterni said of the American comic book:

"It must be admitted that very few cartoonists know how to interpret correctly the techniques adopted from the cinema. They are satisfied to assemble a variety of cartoons without any unifying plan to bind this medley into a whole. Close-Ups, angle shorts, general views, and others are all combined in defiance of good sense, without any consideration for the possible psychological significance of the frames being utilised for strictly descriptive purposes."

He then went on to list a number of French and Italian comics artist, such as Moebius, Hugo Pratt, and Guido Crepax, who do make intelligent use of such techniques. The American comic book has come a long way since that was written and the criticism is not, in general, justified now, but you can still learn a lot from looking at the continentals.

What has been missing is a good basic treatise on the subject to help an artist who is coming fresh to comics to focus on the significance of such things in the context of a picture story. One picture in a narrative sequence can have a special meaning, dependent upon what goes before and after it.

As Will Eisner says in *Comics and Sequential Art*, most comics artists produce their work viscerally. The artist has to rely on his innate talent for telling a good story, and his success or failure is usually a result of natural flair plus experience. But, as with the various aspects of any artform, these things can be studied, and when I came to write *Figure Drawing Without a Model* I tried to tackle the subject from the creator's point of view, showing how the artist is able to make the reader feel certain emotions, sympathise with certain characters, create suspense, curiosity and surprise, and give places, events and people special significance in the context of a story.

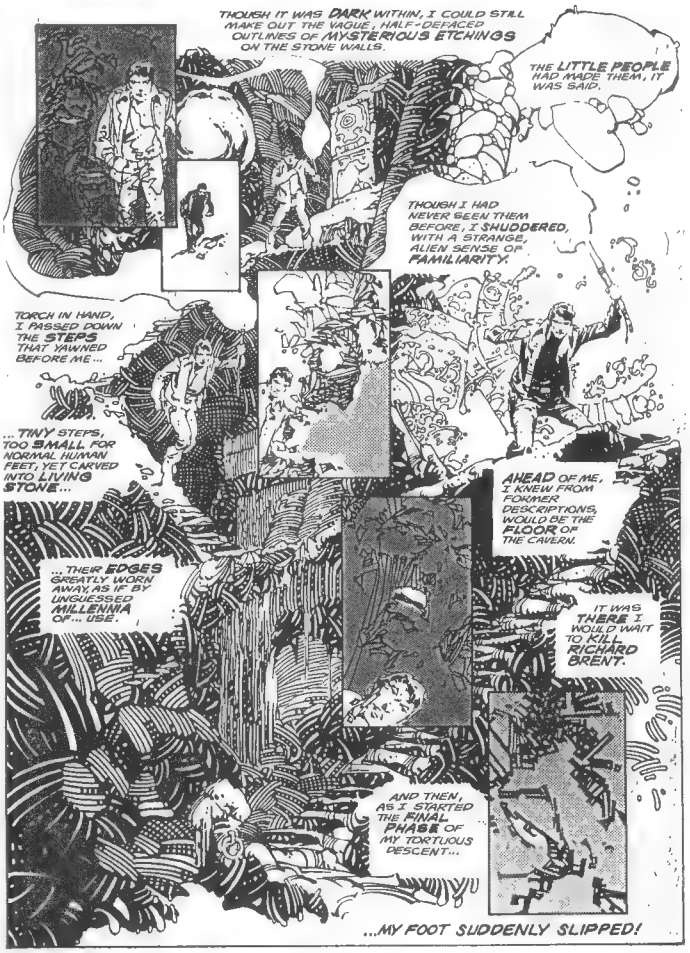
For this section of the Masterclass, then, let's look at a few basic rules for the comics artist.

We'll start with movement. By this I don't mean how to make drawings of people or objects look as though they're in motion because that belongs elsewhere. Here we are concerned about how to control the reader's eye.

Among the illustrations you'll have noticed one which shows a section of the Bayeaux Tapestry – you probably thought 'Here comes some intellectual snob trying to tell us comics have a respectable history.' Not so (not this time, anyway). The Bayeaux Tapestry is a series of illustrations placed end to end to recount a sequence of events in one long strip, two hundred and forty feet long. Its medieval designer intuitively grasped one basic principal of narrative art, that since text is always read left to right, the sequence of illustrations must also run from left to right. Not only that, but the events are always shown happening in that direction, too: horses gallop from left to right, ships sail that way, soldiers march in that direction. Consequently, the reader's attention is constantly urged rightwards. The visuals here are rather naive – there's no front view of anyone coming out towards the reader, or back view of anyone going away – just two-dimensional left-to-right movement, but the rule applies in the same way to the modern comic-book page. The reader's eye is guided by the direction of apparent movement in each frame.

Some time ago, whilst talking about this to John Burns, who has drawn Judge Dredd, James Bond, Modesty Blaise and a thousand other successful strips, he

John Burns


THOUGH IT WAS DARK WITHIN, I COULD STILL MAKE OUT THE VAGUE, HALF-DEFACED OUTLINES OF MYSTERIOUS ETCHINGS ON THE STONE WALLS.
THE LITTLE PEOPLE HAD MADE THEM, IT WAS SAID.
THOUGH I HAD NEVER SEEN THEM BEFORE, I SHUDDERED, WITH A STRANGE, ALIEN SENSE OF FAMILIARITY.
TORCH IN HAND, I PASSED DOWN THE STEPS THAT YAWNED BEFORE ME...
...TINY STEPS, TOO SMALL FOR NORMAL HUMAN FEET, YET CARVED INTO LIVING STONE...
AHEAD OF ME, I KNEW FROM FORMER DESCRIPTIONS, WOULD BE THE FLOOR OF THE CAVERN.
...THEIR EDGES GREATLY WORN AWAY, AS IF BY UNGUESSED MILLENNIA OF... USE.
IT WAS THERE I WOULD WAIT TO KILL RICHARD BRENT.
AND THEN, AS I STARTED THE FINAL PHASE OF MY TORTUOUS DESCENT...
...MY FOOT SUDDENLY SLIPPED!

▲ *Alex Nino*

said that one of the most important functions of each frame is to lead the reader's attention to the next frame. The example shown from *A Silent Armageddon* shows how he puts this into practice. In the example, where the story is full of action and violence, the page is naturally read at a fast pace.

Begin at the top left of the page and notice how your eye naturally travels along the left of the thug as he kicks open the door and along the arm of the man wearing the glasses. As soon as we reach this man's face we naturally look in the direction *he* is looking – diagonally downwards to the hand holding the gun in the next frame; then along the gun and the man's leg to the destination of the bullets, down his other leg to the thug in the next frame as he rushes out the door, diagonally down again via his body to his face in the fourth frame. In the last two frames we trace the movement of the chair, then through the girl's leg and along the arm of the thug to his gun in the last frame.

John Burns' work always shows this measure of control, and he makes it look so-o-o easy!

In comics where the frames are all rectangular and arranged in horizontal rows, it is, of course, natural to pass logically along each row from left to right, then to the left hand end of the next row down, so you may think that it doesn't much matter in what direction the composition flows. Well, to a certain extent, that may be true, so we're including an example of a page layout which would make no sense at all unless the artist is firmly in control of the reader. This is a page from Marvel's *Savage Sword of Conan*, drawn by the maverick Filipino artist, Alex Nino. Here the form of the page is very different from the usual formalised rows of rectangles. In this one, the reader's eye is expertly led in a zigzag motion across and down the page, following the character as he explores the weird caverns, with a narrative text placed at key points along the way. Nino is firmly in control of the reader, skilfully leading him from one piece of text to another, with graphic details of his character's progress along the gloomy corridor interspaced with close-ups of his facial expression. It is a brilliant display of virtuosity and narrative skill.

These are not the only ways you control the reader. As I said earlier, you can make him feel certain emotions, too, by the way in which you choose to draw each image. We'll tackle that in next month's Masterclass. CW

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multimedia films

Jurassic Park opened in July to a record turnout, taking £4,875,137 in its first weekend opening at 406 cinemas, smashing the previous record of £2.8 million held by *Batman Returns* which opened in July 1992. It has since bypassed *Ghost* for total gross, topping £24 million in 20 days. There's now talk of an animated series and a script for **Jurassic Park II**...

Talking of *Batman Returns*: there's always a spate of rumours that hit the papers before a major blockbuster movie, and one is that **Batman III** will feature Sharon Stone. Stone, who shot to fame in *Basic Instinct* and cemented her notorious, sexy reputation with *Sliver*, is said to be willing to team up with Michael Keaton for a cool $5.5 million. She is currently shooting **Intersection** with director Mark Rydell where she plays the wife of two-timing Richard Gere, and is lined up for appearances in Sam *(Army of Darkness)* Raimi's western, **The Quick and the Dead** as a gunslinger, and another Rydell feature, **Manhattan Ghost Story** as a sexy ghost.

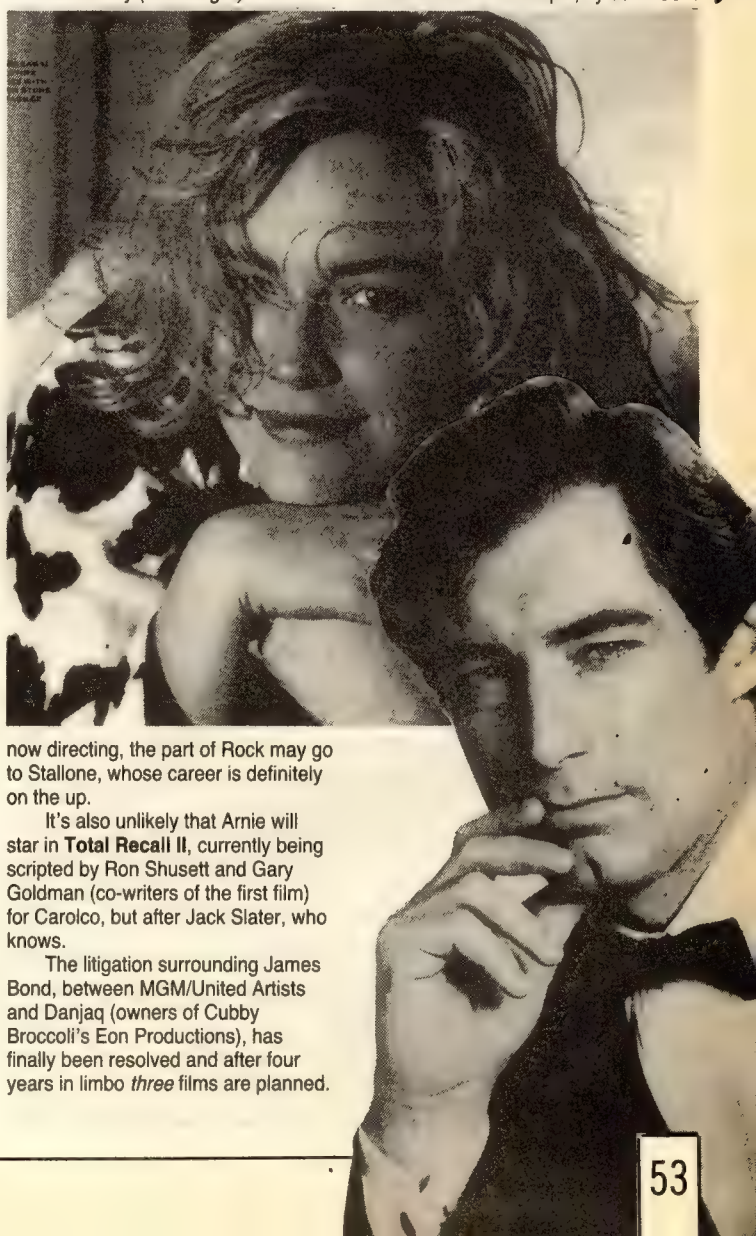
More rumours have Michael Keaton possibly offered $5 million to don the Bat costume for a third time, Robin Williams to play The Riddler, Robin to appear for the first time, played by black actor, Marlon Wayans, and Jack Nicholson being feted to return as The Joker. Tim Burton, director of the first two movies, will be executive producer of the new movie, which will be directed of Joel *(Flatliners, Falling Down)* Schumacher.

And Michelle Pfeiffer, who played the latex-clad Selina Kyle in *Batman Returns*, is to star in a spin-off **Catwoman** movie which Burton may direct; she's currently rumoured to be taking on the role (from Geena Davis) of **Mistress of the Seas**, a swashbuckler by Paul *(Total Recall)* Verhoeven.

Filming of the £40 million *Batman III* may take place once again at Pinewood Studios in Buckinghamshire where a £3 million Gotham City set was torn down after the second movie was filmed in the USA. Good news for the British film industry in the wake of the closure of Elstree Studios, where *Superman* and *Star Wars* were filmed.

20th Century Fox have picked up the rights to a live action **X-Men** big-budget movie.

After the panning of his latest movie, **The Last Action Hero** (which isn't *that* bad), Arnie will be teaming up with James Cameron for a remake of the French movie, *La Totale* under the title **True Lies**. After that he'll film **The Crusades** with Paul Verhoeven, but is almost certainly out of the running for the long-mooted **Sgt Rock** with producer Joel Silver: Silver was trying to team-up Arnie with Bruce Willis, Sly Stallone and Jean Claude Van Damme (who has just begun work on **Time Cop** with Peter *(2010)* Hyams) to film the John Milius script, but with Renny *(Cliffhanger)* Harlin now directing, the part of Rock may go to Stallone, whose career is definitely on the up.



It's also unlikely that Arnie will star in **Total Recall II**, currently being scripted by Ron Shusett and Gary Goldman (co-writers of the first film) for Carolco, but after Jack Slater, who knows.

The litigation surrounding James Bond, between MGM/United Artists and Danjaq (owners of Cubby Broccoli's Eon Productions), has finally been resolved and after four years in limbo *three* films are planned. The 17th Bond movie, **Property of a Lady**, is being scripted by Michael *(Licence to Kill, Cliffhanger)* France and due to start filming in February 1994. Two more scripts, by John Cork

Alien3 makes its sell-through debut on October 11, effectively concluding the 14-year space adventures of Warrant Officer Ellen Ripley and Jones the cat. **Tony Earnshaw** takes a look at the troubled production of the final (?) film, and asks the one person who might know if Ripley will rise again, **Sigourney Weaver**.

Smart directors rarely make sequels to their own blockbuster films because they know only too well that they've got to at least equal the success of the last movie. Even the exceptions, like Steven Spielberg and his Indiana Jones *trilogy, sometimes fall foul of the sequel curse, with the unique classic followed by a lacklustre sequel.*

In Spielberg's case he more than made up for Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom *with* Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade. *With a little help from Sean Connery, of course.*

In the case of the Alien *trilogy, both original director Ridley Scott and sequel director James Cameron stayed out of the running for the latest adventure, the stunningly-titled* Alien³. *The awesome responsibility for creating a new adventure after the starkness and darkness of* Alien *and the blood and thunder of* Aliens *fell to first-time director David Fincher.*

The final result of his labours was not the unmitigated disaster many had predicted, but it was certainly the least satisfying of the movies. Many laid the fault squarely on Fincher's inexperienced shoulders, while others blamed the movie's lack of pace and character development and – horror of horrors – the death of the central heroine: audiences in America have refused to accept Ripley's demise, despite the fact that she was last seen clutching a newly-born alien to her belly as she plummeted towards certain death in a vat of molten metal. Many are clinging to the hope that *Alien IV* may be on the cards...

Actress Sigourney Weaver laughed off the possibility of a fourth Alien movie along with suggestions that Ripley was to make a strange, *Dallas*-style reappearance:

"In America there is this bizarre lack of acceptance that Ripley is, in fact, gone," she told me.

"It's a bit disconcerting for me because I felt we had made it pretty clear, but - because it's science fiction – producers are so thrilled that they have this possible opportunity to reconstitute me from my fingernail clippings!

"It just means that everything's left open, because of science fiction, but it was our intention – and it still is my intention – that Ripley's gone. Anyway, I don't think it's going to happen immediately, so I don't have to worry about it. As far as I'm concerned, I've finished the Alien series."

In retrospect, Fincher did the bravest thing possible. In a bid to put his own stamp of individuality on the film, he dispensed entirely with James Cameron's thrill-a-minute, effects-strewn spectacular and went all-out for a movie with its own uniquely dark and brooding identity. If he was going to have even the remotest chance of following two ground-breaking classics, he knew his storyline and his setting would have to be totally innovative. Gone were the gung-ho space marines with their hi-tech blasters, flamethrowers and impregnable assault vehicles. Also notable by their absence were the hundreds of aliens who infested the planet like a swarm of lethal locusts.

Instead, the young director opted for a single monster and a group of almost helpless potential victims, harking back to the first film and the predatory beast aboard the Nostromo.

Early reports all pointed to a disaster. A first-time director whose only prior experience of film was rock videos and commercials; a script touched up by anybody and everybody, plus the office cat; a disenchanted star and a runaway budget which rocketed from below $30 million to more than $60 million. In addition, *Alien³* fell victim to an over-running production schedule and a series of costly re-shoots. Chief among Fincher's many worries was the screenplay, which initially set the film on a monastic colony.

Numerous re-writes resulted in the final shooting script which based the adventure on a prison planet called Fury, suitably lice-infested to take advantage of the actors' already shaven heads.

films CONTINUED

and Richard Smith, are also in the works. MGM have budgeted the movie at $42 million – $10m more than the 1989 *Licence to Kill* – and lined up *Scandal* and *Memphis Belle* director, Michael Caton-Jones.

Fans of the traditional horror movie are in for a treat with the return of those titans of terror, Hammer Films. Hammer, which made its last feature film 17 years ago, has a clutch of new projects on the boil following a new deal with Warner Bros and big-time director Richard *(Lethal Weapon)* Donner.

Hammer's Legal Executive, Graham Skeggs, revealed that Warners have optioned the rights on all the studio's old films, including the classic Dracula and Frankenstein films, also optioned are a remake the 1961 sf classic **The Day the Earth Caught Fire**, the rights to which are part-owned by Hammer, along with **Hideous Whisper**, a new project based on a horror novel by Andrew Lawrence. First in front of the cameras is likely to be a big-screen version of **Vlad the Impaler**, shooting of which is set to go ahead in both England and Eastern Europe, with both Hungary and Poland being mooted as possible locations.

Skeggs is convinced that the time is right for a full-scale Hammer revival, with Coppola's **Bram Stoker's Dracula** (currently the most requested rental video) opening the floodgates for horror once again: "Things are moving a great deal at the moment and the genre, after Coppola's film, is very popular.

"In production at the moment are a Frankenstein film *(by Francis Ford Coppola, with Kenneth Branagh as the Baron & Robert De Niro as the creature)*, a Werewolf film *(Wolf, with Jack Nicholson & Michelle Pfeiffer)* and a Mummy film by different people. Horror is viable, and that makes *Vlad* more popular. The story, after all, is the definitive Dracula prequel."

The cast of the new movie remains shrouded in secrecy, although Skeggs quashed rumours that Peter Cushing, now 80, and Christopher Lee, 71, would appear for old times' sake. "Peter is very old now and almost totally retired. I doubt if he could cope with a full shooting schedule, and even a cameo is unlikely. There are no plans for Christopher Lee, either."

So, is Britain about to see a renaissance for the House of Hammer? "I hope so," says Skeggs. "We are fully prepared for that to happen. Hopefully something big will come of it all."

James Walsh/Tony Earnshaw

Flawed masterpiece or monumental, and costly, mistake? That's the question...

Alien³ carried with it so much expectation in its very name that director David Fincher was never going to have an easy ride. After the loss of the original director, the press field-day when it was revealed that the script had had more changes than Sigourney Weaver had hair, it was always going to be greeted with suspicion.

Sequel-mania has always been Hollywood's downfall, because a sequel is rarely made to a failed movie. Success breeds sequels, and, logically, why should anyone want to change a successful formula? A big-grossing movie is expected to pull in the bucks second time round, the film becomes part of a sequence, and a monetary event rather than a story. *Die Hard* becomes *Die Harder* by going through the same moves with a bigger budget.

And perhaps it was there that the movie earned its criticism, by the default of *not* being another *Aliens*, rather than as a result of what was actually on the screen. Fincher's was a retrograde step, down to one alien rather than adding to Cameron's hundreds by going for wall-to-wall facehuggers, limiting the cast to two dozen rather than being knee-deep in marines, technicians, Company-men and flamethrowers.

The video release is a Fox-granted chance to re-evaluate the movie, and on the small screen it holds up, from the effective cross-cutting of the opening, to the final, inevitable death of Ripley. In retrospect, Fincher made an excellent job of ignoring and avoiding a high-tech more-than-Cameron rip-off, and gave the sequel a life of its own, independent of, but adding to, the Alien canon. It deserves – and now has – a second chance.

Pete Taylor

British actor Brian Glover, with his intimidating, shaven, dome-like cranium, won the part of Andrews, warden of the penal colony. His first meeting with Fincher was a revelation: he was chosen as 'the look' for the film.

"I walked through the door and the director and producer were there. David Fincher looked so young, like a boy, but he said to the producer, 'This is the look I want, this bald head. They should all look like him'."

It was a huge blunder. In the darkened caverns and passageways which became the movie's sets, a crowd of actors became a crowd of indistinguishable shaven heads, and in killing off Hicks and Newt in the movie's opening sequences, he crudely severed the last remaining links between his film and James Cameron's.

In terms of his star, Fincher removed one of the vital aspects of her character – her mane of black hair. Only the fact that she was the sole female saved her from blending in with her co-stars.

Weaver's hair became something of a sore point after the film was wrapped. Fincher called her back to the UK to re-shoot a number of key scenes, but Weaver – her hair growing back to its former glory – was adamant she would not shave her head again. The film was, almost miraculously, completed, despite Weaver's reluctance to participate in re-shoots.

But the damage had already been done. Slated for an early 1992 release, *Alien³* was put back further until, finally, it made its British premiere on August 21 as a late summer blockbuster. On its release the film received a drubbing from the critic and a mixed reception from punters across the globe. To some it was a stylish new addition to the story; to others, an uneven mess.

Fincher should have anticipated the brick wall he would inevitably run into. In the wake of the fast-moving, roller-coaster ride that was *Aliens*, moviegoers' expectations were running at fever pitch.

But despite its faults – and there are many – the movie was not the monumental failure everyone predicted. That it was flawed is undoubted, but it remains a bold stab *(is that a pun, Tony? – Ed)* at what was quite possibly *the* most impossible task of the nineties: making a success out of a film that was always going to be compared to its illustrious predecessors.

If *Alien³* is the last of the saga, then David Fincher can hold his head up with some degree of pride. But if, as rumours continue to suggest, there are plans for a big screen version of the *Aliens Vs Predator* comic strip, he'd better watch out.

ALIEN 3 COMPETITION

WIN COPIES OF ALIEN³

Answer the simple question below and a copy of the widescreen Alien³ could be yours. Just tell us who played Bishop, and send the answer to Alien Competition, Castle House, 97 High Street, Colchester, CO1 1TH. Entries must arrive by October 1st.

The release of **The Abyss: Special Edition** (Fox, 164mins, 15) was wholly welcome by the Taylor clan which we settled down to watch with anticipation. And it was well worth two-hours-forty-five in the dark with a bowl of cheesy snacks. A qualified success: the additional footage added to the already long James Cameron epic fleshed out some of the characters and convincingly strengthened the bonds between the team, making for higher emotional impact when Cameron hit the heartstrings; the bulk of the extra time was in the ending, a series of stuttering war footage to explain why the alien denizens of the deep might want to destroy humanity, and a sfx tidal wave that I thought was a figment of Orson Scott Card, who did the film novelisation, although nothing can save the ending from being seen as anything other than a tribute to Spielberg. It's a spectacular film, in widescreen, and nails the attention.

The peculiarities of rental and sell-through mean that you can't yet buy **Bram Stoker's Dracula** from your local vid shop, but it's such a lush production that if you've not yet seen it, it's well worth borrowing a copy from the local Titles.

On the other hand, in October you'll be able to buy **Buffy the Vampire Slayer** (Fox, 82mins, PG), if your tastes run to giggling, bleached blondes. Both Donald Sutherland and Rutger Hauer are wasted in this trifle which has pretty Kristy Swanson as the Chosen One, guided by Sutherland to destroy vampire Hauer, and vacuous Luke Perry as the teen romantic interest. Half the cast you just want to shake by the neck until they get a life, which would be sad if only you didn't believe that California high-school 'babes' really were this

dumb. A pointless movie, no pun intended.

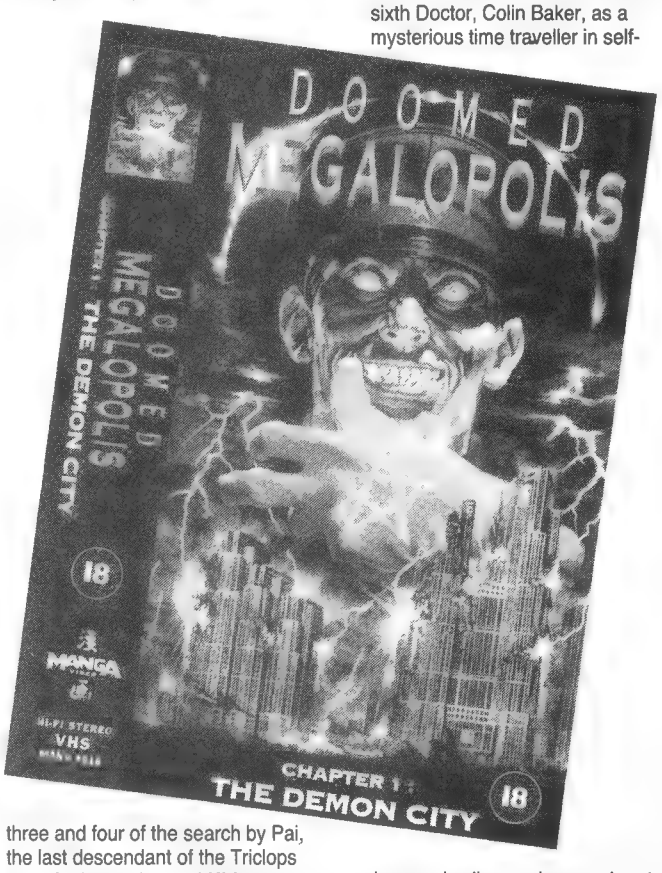
If you prefer your horror fast and furious you could do worse than **Braindead** (Polygram, 100mins, 18), a hilarious death-fest from the man who brought us *Bad Taste* and *Meet the Feebles*, Peter Jackson. Made in New Zealand, this is an abasement to the alter of gore. Leaking zombies and oozing putrescence fill the screen as Lionel Cosgrove (Timothy Blame)'s mother (Elizabeth Moody) becomes the victim of a Sumatran Monkey Rat-bite, the wound transforming her into a hilariously hideous monster. Soon Lionel and girlfriend Paquita have a whole family of flesh-eaters. The party at the end, complete with evil uncle and a lawnmower, is a high-point of an uncompromising and bloody effective comedy.

Horror of a slightly different sort now, with **Doomed Megalopolis** (Manga, 50mins, 15), the first part of four which will be released over the next couple of months at the low price of £8.99. Based on the legend of Tairo No Masakado, believed to be the guardian of Tokyo, and set in 1908, although exactly how 'period' it is you can only guess; there are plans to expand the city. Kato, an evil satanist, has his own plans to raise Masakado and manipulate him to his own evil ends using the powers of a young girl.

It's the usual stirring mixture of excellent animation and high-speed action, and at a price where you can get a taste of anime if you've not already tried it.

Crying Freeman (Manga, 50mins, 18) gets its certificate for a delicate love scene and a topless female gangster. It's a thriller set in contemporary Tokyo about an assassin for the Chinese Mafia who falls in love with a witness to a murder; Yoh, the assassin, must return to kill her, but turns on his bosses instead. It's a straight adaptation of the highly recommended Manga.

Manga will release three more stories in September: **Judge** (50 mins, 15), where the Judge of Darkness passes judgement on evildoers who are overlooked by the law on behalf of the wrongfully dead, **3x3 Eyes Pt.2** (58mins, 18), chapters



three and four of the search by Pai, the last descendant of the Triclops race, for humanity, and **Ultimate Teacher** (56mins, 15), a slapstick comedy where victory over the genetic catastrophe, Ganbachi, is likely to be determined by a choice of underwear rather than machismo.

Other recent releases or coming soon vids include the not-so-bad Arnie **Conan the Barbarian** (Fox, 129mins, 15) given the widescreen treatment for full swordswinging effect, **Planet of the Apes** (Fox, 112mins, PG) also on widescreen, and Terry Gilliam's **Jabberwocky** (Fox, 104mins, PG), a rather more Grimm fantasy than Lewis Carroll.

On rental there's **Babylon 5** (Warner, PG). Babylon 5 is a space station, but anyone comparing it unfavourably with *Deep Space 9* is going to get thrown down the nearest wormhole. Set after a near calamitous war, humans and aliens have come together in mutual distrust to trade, spy and conspire. The plot is riveting and the station a triumph of functional design over banal aesthetics. Forget

the rest, SF TV has come of age!

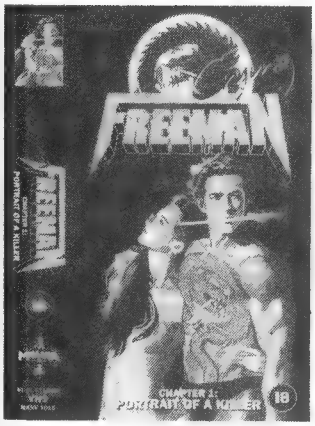
The Stranger appears in two new releases from Pickwick, starring sixth Doctor, Colin Baker, as a mysterious time traveller in self-imposed exile on a barren planet as the first tape (80mins, PG) opens. In 'Summoned By Shadows' he ignores a plea for help from the victim of a macabre conjurer who seems to have limitless power, whilst in 'More Than A Messiah', The Stranger and his companion, Miss Brown, discover decaying bodies on a paradise world where interplanetary tourists are being swallowed by the sea, and an obsessive girl threatens the life of everyone on the planet.

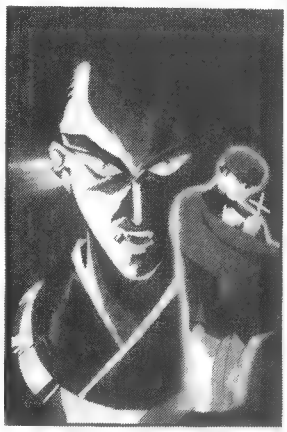
The second volume (50mins, PG) contains one story, 'In Memory Alone' in which both the Stranger and Miss Brown have their memories wiped. In a deserted railway station, neither knowing who the other is, they are met by Mr Minor, a gibberish-talking commuter. Making up the rest of the tape is a mini-documentary shot on location during filming.

Pete Taylor/John Gosling

BOOK Reviews

SEPTEMBER RELEASES





***Viking release the book of the month in the shape of Virtual Light**, the latest novel by cyberpunk meister, William Gibson (£14.99). It's more a hard-boiled crime thriller set in near future california where Berry Rydell, an ex-cop signed up with IntenSecure Armed Response, is teamed up with a black skip-tracer, Lucius Warbaby, whose talent is for hunting people down in the virtual reality maze of DatAmerica. It sits up there with Gibson's other novels,* Neuromancer *and* Mona Lisa Overdrive*, shades and all.*

Slightly delayed, but Bantam UK should have **The Death and Life of Superman** by Roger Stern (£9.99) out by now, a retelling of the Doomsday storyline. There's also a juvenile version by Louise Simonson under the title **Superman: Doomsday and Beyond** (£2.99). Radio 5 are going to be dramatising the series for broadcast in September/ October.

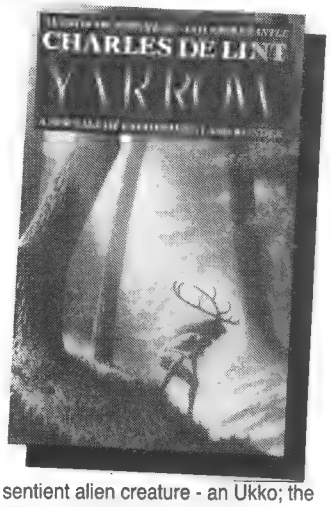
Bantam also have **The Powers That Be** by Anne McCaffrey & Elizabeth Anne Scarborough (£14.99) set on a terraformed world of snow and ice full of strange events; Major Uan Maddock is sent to infiltrate Petaybee society to find out what is causing the eerie problems on the planet. And there's **Damia's Children**, also by McCaffrey (£8.99), the third novel to feature 'Rowan', a powerful female telepath.

Corgi have **The Hootlet** by John McNeil (£4.99) a debut novel about a serial killer at large on the banks of the Clyde. Sandy Douglas is the writer of a birdwatching column in a London newspaper who becomes involved in the investigation, only to have suspicion fall on him. **Grunts** by Mary Gentle (£4.99) is an excellent comedy fantasy, told from the point of the sword fodder in the front line of the battle between Good and Evil; Orc Captain Ashnak and his band are foot soldiers with the Evil Horde of Darkness against an outnumbered, tactically inept forces of Light...and he knows that Good has to triumph. And following in Douglas Adams' footsteps, Robert Rankin has the fourth novel in the Brentford Trilogy released - **The Sprouts of Wrath** (£3.99): Brentford is the astonishing choice to host the next Olympic Games, stirring up primeval, ancient forces.

Terry Pratchett's juvenile adventure, **Only You Can Save Mankind**, the first in the Johnny Maxwell series, is released in pb (£2.99); meanwhile, Corgi Audio have the 'Truckers' trilogy, **Truckers**, **Diggers**, and **Wings**, released on audio cassette (£7.99 each), read by Tony *(Baldrick)* Robinson. The double cassettes last about 3 hours each, and are aimed at the kids...of all ages, that is. Also in the youth department is the fourth Captain Scarlet novel by Dave Morris, **The Launching** (£2.50).

Stephen Gallagher, Preston SF Group regular and horror writer, has a new psychological thriller due from Coronet: **Nightmare, With Angel** (£4.99) concerns ten-year-old Marianne and her friendship with an enigmatic stranger, Ryan. The two go on the run to find the girl's mother, much to the horror of her father and the police who know Ryan has a secret in his past.

Gollancz have two new titles in hardcover, including the latest from Ian Watson, the first of a two-part epic, **Lucky's Harvest** (£16.99), set on Kaleva, Earth's only colony, discovered by Lucky Sariola 400 years ago when she awakened a



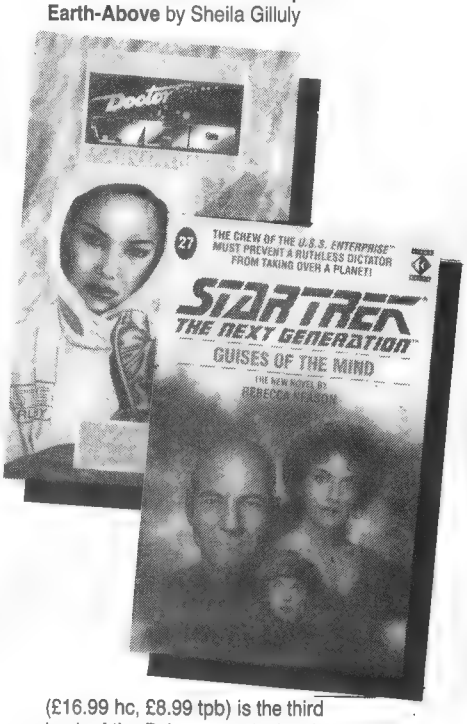
sentient alien creature - an Ukko; the alien entity genetically alters her, taking her to a planet resembling the stories she retells of her grandmother. Immortal, Lucky banishes her youngest daughter for bearing an alien-fathered mutant child, and sets in motion a series of events that bring havoc to the colony. Simon R. Green is a rapidly rising star and his latest, **Down Among the Dead Men** (£14.99 hc, £8.99 tpb) is another intriguing fantasy, set ten years after the earlier **Blue Moon Rising**. Something immeasurably old has been awakened in the Forest kingdom...

New Worlds (£5.99) hits its third volume under editor David Garnett with stories by Paul J. McCauley, Simon Ings, Charles Stross, Gwyneth Jones, Michael Moorcock and Brian Aldiss, plus non-fiction from John Clute.

HarperCollins have the second volume of David Zindell's Neverness trilogy in tpb: in **Broken God** (£8.99), we follow Danlo the Wild, abandoned son of Mallory Ringess - now a god - as he seeks the Unreal City, Neverness. There he discovers the sinister Architects of the Universal Cybernetic Church who created the disease that killed the neanderthal tribe that raised him. **Dog Wizard** is an original pb by Barbara Hambly (£4.99), a fast-moving fantasy by the author of the 'Darwath' trilogy; Louise Cooper's **The Master** (£4.99) is the third volume in the 'Time Master' trilogy; there are a heap of Piers Anthony reprints, including books 1-3 of the **Bio of a Space Tyrant**, **Fractal Mode** (all £4.99), the latter tying in with Anthony's new hardcover, **Chaos Mode**.

Other titles include **Blood Trillium** by Julian May (£4.99) set 12 years after the events of *Black Trillium*; **To Your Scattered Bodies Go**, a classic reprint by Philip Jose Farmer (£4.99); **Firstworld Chronicles 3: From Enchantry** by Philip G. Williamson, original to pb (£4.99), plus an intriguing sf/horror novel, **Dead Girls** by Richard Calder (£4.99) which combines a deadly disease which turns girls into dolls, nanoengineering, DNA recombination and the mysterious Dr. Toxicophilous.

Mr. Murder is the latest Headline hardcover by the bestseller, Dean R. Koontz (£16.99) about a killer who doesn't know his own name, cannot recall who gives him his assignments, or why his targets must die. More horror in Richard Layman's **Endless Night** (£16.99) when 16-year-old Jody witnesses the brutal killing of a family she is staying with. Only one of the murder-rapists is left behind to dispose of any witnesses, and Jody will have to kill him to escape. Kit Craig's latest is more a psychological thriller: **Twice Burned** (£16.99) tells the story of two fourteen year-old twins and the increasingly bizarre, deadly world they live in following the death of their father. **The Emperor of Earth-Above** by Sheila Gilluly


Doctor
27
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STAR TREK
THE NEXT GENERATION
GUISES OF THE MIND
THE NEW NOVEL BY
REBECCA NEASON

(£16.99 hc, £8.99 tpb) is the third book of the Painter, continuing the story of Aengus, the Painter who lost his sense of colour. **Black Wolf** by Philip Caveney (£16.99) is about a horror writer and an obsessed fan whose letters grow ever more weird, and whose identification with the

I SHALL NOW GET DRESSED, PACK MY SANDWICHES AND BE OFF TO THE TIN SOLDIERS PREMIERE TO THE BOSS AS A TREAT. WHEN I'M BACK, WHEN I'M BACK I'LL BE OUT OF IT. WHO'S DOING THE SAUCE FOR MR THANN TONIGHT? I'LL ALREADY IS STICK UP FOR HIM BY THE CHAOS!
GRRHH.
ZOOO! GOT AWAY!

novel's supernatural hero may be behind a series of death's dubbed 'the wolfman murders'; there's also a pb of Caveney's **Speak No Evil** about a radio host and a whispering caller who claims he's just committed a murder.

Icon relaunched the 1970s 'Beginners' series a couple of years ago and are adding four new titles this autumn, the first, **Kafka for Beginners** (£7.99) illustrated by the legendary underground artist, Robert Crumb. It retells some of Kafka's best known stories (*Metamorphosis*, *The Trial*, etc), bizarre fantasies perfectly suited to Crumb's bizarre, obsessive imagination. The text is by award winning radio playwright, David Zane Mairowitz.

Legend have omnibus edition of two Greg Bear novels: **Songs of Earth and Power** (£5.99) contains *The Infinity Concerto* and *The Serpent Mage*; the omnibus **Status Civilisation and Mindsweep** by Robert Sheckley speaks for itself. **Topaz Fire** by Brian Layfield (£14.99 hc, £8.99 tpb) is a sword and sorcery invasion story, a battle between warriors and wizards, and a young girl who is sent to aid the mounted warriors of Chaw.

The Stone Within by David Wingrove (£5.99) is book four in the Chung Kuo series set in the Chinese Worldstate of the 23rd century, published by New English Library. A new, ruthless criminal force is emerging in the Triad levels of the City, whilst a violent struggle among the ruling T'Ang may shift the balance of power of the world spanning Empire.

The Community (£4.99) is Ben Leech's impressive debut adult horror novel from Pan, although as Stephen Bowkett he has written sf, fantasy and horror for the teenage market. The community of the title are aliens who have lived amongst us in human form for thousands of years who now face the Kin Slayer; the police think he's a serial killer, but something not Kin, and not human, is systematically slaying both. Leech will at FantasyCon in October for an official launch. Pan also have **The Little Country** by Charles de Lint (£15.99 hc, £8.99 tpb), that being the title of a magic book which seems to tailor itself to each person who reads it, drawing them into a world of darkness and dread. **Yarrow** (£4.99) is also by de Lint, a fantasy of Cat Midhir's vivid dreams, which she uses as the basis for her fantasy novels, and the link between the shadowy figure that haunts them and the real-life murders in Cat's home town.

Pocket Books release **Young Blood** (£4.99), a vampire novel by the author of *The Empire of Fear* and *The Angel of Pain*, Brian Stableford and, as you'd expect, it's slightly different from your average neck-biter, a mixture of seductive romance and dark horror as philosophy student Anne Charet explores the darker corners of the human mind, and Stableford raises some interesting theories on why vampires hold such a compelling interest.

Titan continue their vast output of Star Trek novels, the latest being **Star Trek, the Next Generation #27: Guises of the Mind** by Rebecca Neason (£3.99), plus reprints of **ST,TNG #11: Gulliver's Fugitives** by Kieth Shares, **ST #8: Time For Yesterday** by A.C. Crispin, and **ST #20: Vulcan's Glory** by D.C. Fontana.

The latest batch of Dr Who adventures continue from Virgin with **Iceberg** by David Banks (£4.50), plus **Silver Nemesis** by Kevin Clarke and **Invasion** by Ian Marter (both £3.50) are the two Target reprints this month. **Dr. Who: The Sixties** is a £9.99 pb, by David Howe, Mark Stammers & Stephen James Walker, the definitive record of the early years of the show. And if you've got kids, try the *Sonic the Hedgehog* series of novels, **Robotnik's Laboratory** and **Fourth Dimension** both by Martin Adams (all £2.99.

Dave McLoughlin

NEWS

NEWS

Neil Gaiman's first short story collection, Angels & Visitations, collects 12 stories and 8 poems in a 160-page hardcover, illustrated by P. Craig Russell, Charles Vess, Bill Sienkiewicz & Mike Zulli, and published by Dream Haven Books in October.

Steve Bissette tied for the 'Best Novelette' in the Bram Stoker Awards for his story **Aliens: Tribes**, published by Dark Horse (and currently running in the UK in *Aliens*); his co-winner was Joe R. Lansdale, scriptwriter of DC's *Jonah Hex: Six-Gun Mojo*.

The 3rd annual paperback and pulp bookfair is to be held at the Grosvenor Hotel, near Victoria Station in London, on Saturday, 23 October. A number of guests are still to be announced, although the event should see the launch of at least one new book. Admission is £2.00, with dealer tables still available. More details from P.G. Chapman on 0634 853157, or L. Flanagan on 0373 865371.

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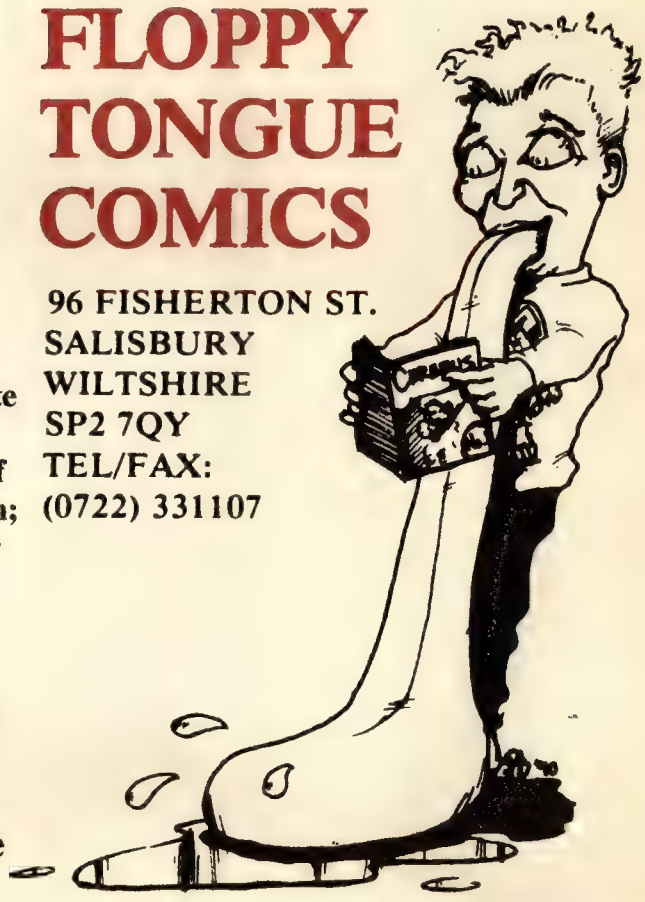

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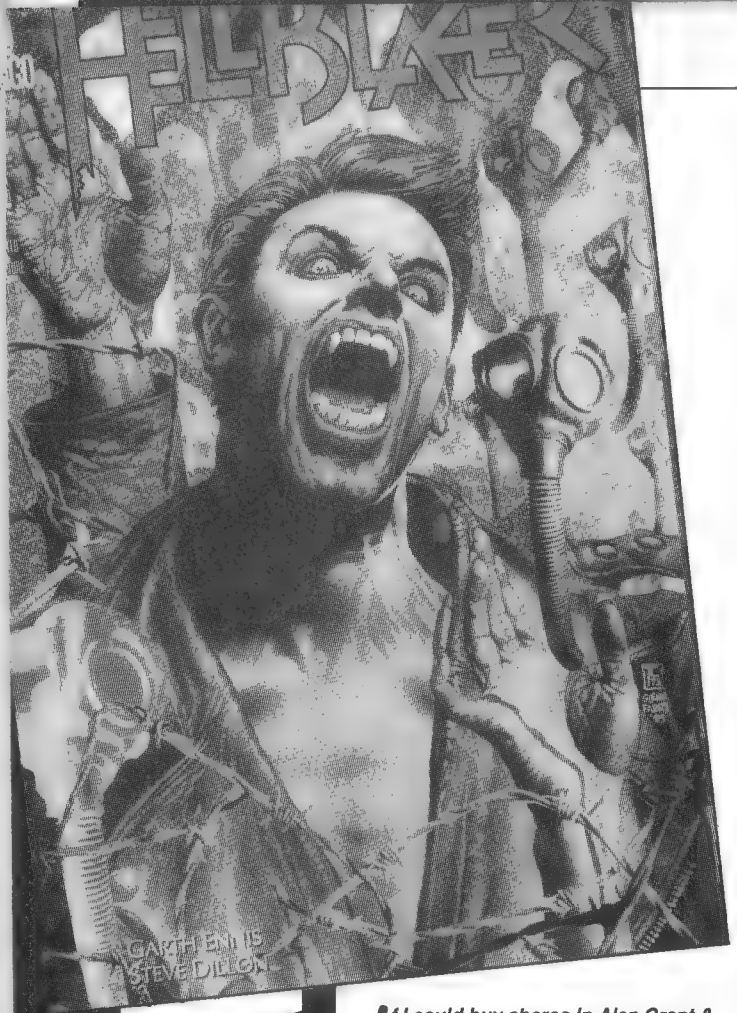


Reviews

If I could buy shares in Alan Grant & John Wagner Inc. I would. They're the two most prolific writers at work in the UK, two of the most respected. Wagner created Judge Dredd, for christ's sake, and remains the best writer to have touched the character. So it was pleasure to see the* Judge Dredd Megazine *announce that he would be back on the character he was so desperately needed on. For all the humour that Garth Ennis and Mark Millar have tried to inject in the strip in* 2000AD*, Dredd never came across as he should: he is a black-hearted bastard through-and-through, wiped of emotion. Stories along the line of* Democracy Now*, published earlier this year by Mandarin work not on the emotions they instil in Dredd, but the crash of ideas and ideals against the brick wall of Central Justice. It's* that *playoff that makes a great Judge Dredd story.

'Slick Dickens: Dressed to Kill' in **Judge Dredd Megazine 34** (Fleetway, £1.25) has a bowl-busting opening, heralding the escape of the sharpest-dressed villain in the Dredd canon. Nine pages of sartorial excellence, and Dredd getting to work with a daystick. The artwork, by the pseudonymous Xuasus, is individualistic, thankfully not Bisley-esque – and we're beginning to see second and third generation copies nowadays.

Elsewhere we have the emotionally charged climax as Anderson quits the Judges in 'Childhood's End' by Alan Grant and Kev Walker. It has been on the cards for some time now, following the death of Psi Judge Corey, questions of faith and learning how her father died: Grant was leading somewhere, and now we see the destination. Out there, *ad astra*. But how well she'll work outside her environment we can only wait to see. Meanwhile, re-read the end-of-an-era yarn about how aliens created life on Earth and now want to destroy it because we've not proved worthy. Dumb premise, sharp dialogue, brilliant art.

Wagner & Grant are back together for **Lobo: Unamerican Gladiators** (4-issues, DC, $1.75) which has just finished but available in the back-issue boxes if you didn't see it first time round. Did DC pick on artist Cam Kennedy because he was going to do *Judgement on Gotham 2* and they wanted to show the new team off? Or because they had some of the old members of *The Outcasts* in the story? Who knows. Kennedy has always been a good, solid artist who really shone on war stories like *Light and Darkness War* and *Dark Empire*. Does that solid, straight-forward style translate into the frenetic, fraggin' bastich world of Lobo? The jury's still out on that, I think. Frame-by-frame it's well drawn, but lacked the dynamism of layout to carry a story about the ultraviolent Maim Game at the pace it needed. Storywise it's up there where it's needed: over the top.

Where *Unamerican Gladiators* is Sunday afternoon Lobo, the **Lobo Convention Special 1** (DC, $1.75) is Saturday Night down the pub. Mix Lobo, a copy of *Superman #75*, some obvious targets, and you have the full story. Knee jerk it may be, but with Kev O'Neill at his Code-breaking best, Lobo being mistaken for Bisley, and a few big bombs at the end, and you have a book bigger than Rob Liefeld's ego.

Chain Gang War 3 (DC, $1.75) is an example of a good idea spread too thin. The set-up is promising, if superficial: a gang of vengeful vigilantes take out top crime bosses and bang them up in their own mansion basement jail. It's a neat, slickly written one-story idea with nowhere else to go, certainly not in an ongoing monthly. This lacks the black humour that makes Wagner's writing so good and has no redeeming features whatsoever; the artwork is nothing special, simplified Image poses which seem to have attracted the Image boys themselves as Dave Johnson is now moving off the book to take up something for the latter.

A better buy is **Mechanismo** (Mandarin, £7.99) which is Wagner running through his paces on Dredd. Before I start to sound like a stuck record, go out and buy it and find out for yourself why its worth the money.

Which leaves **Shadow of the Bat 16** as another gem to end on. Let's hope that Bret Blevins is given a chance, arriving in the Shadow of the Breyfogle. It took until page 6 before I started to enjoy his art, but whiz past those lacklustre pages and you get somewhere that's half-realistic, half *Batman Animated*. By the end it really grows on you. As this is a 'Knightfall' cross-over, there's Jean-Paul going through his paces as the AzBat, with Anarky and the Scarecrow to contend with.

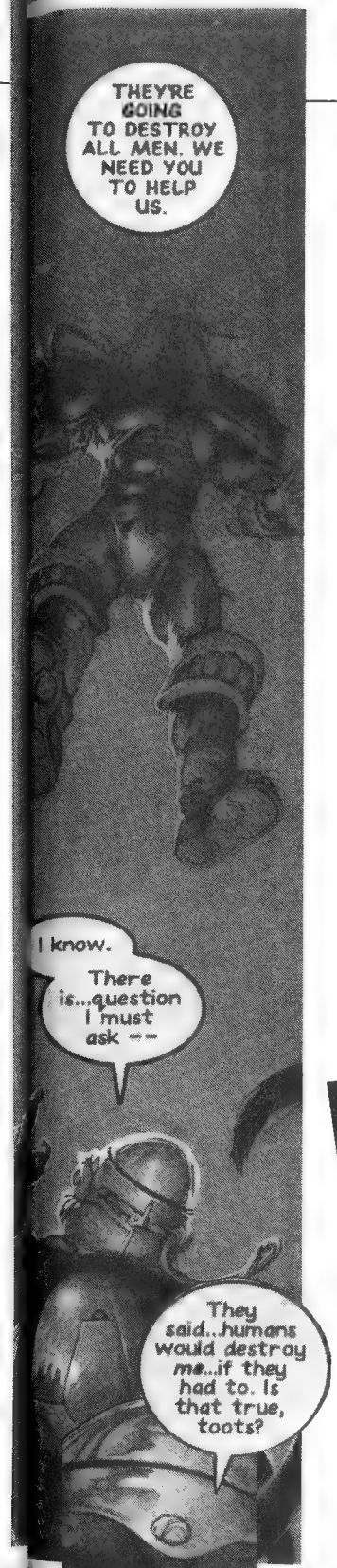
So how do the best of British stand up? About three out of four each I make it, which is above par for the course.

Richard Hudson

Say, did you hear Jim Shooter's started a new publishing company?

After his overture of high-profile publicity comes the first of Defiant's line, in the form of **Warriors Of Plasm 1** ($2.95). Shooter seems to be employing similar tactics to those that made his time at Valiant so lucrative: the storytelling makes few concessions to contemporary trends (like not having a story), while the marketing – if it proves as successful as it did previously – will make a large contribution toward *defining* trends.

So *Plasm* won't have any trouble grabbing your attention, but does it deserve it? Visually, it's an unremarkable blend of Moebius and Giger imagery; the setting and situations lead to some (unintentionally?) marvellous surreal dialogue that Vic Reeves can only dream of emulating. You could foster an entire industry of T-shirts with lines like, "Just tickle the fuzzy spot to shoot". Didn't tweak *my* nodes. . . .


THEYRE GOING TO DESTROY ALL MEN. WE NEED YOU TO HELP US.
I know. There is...question I must ask --
They said...humans would destroy me...if they had to. Is that true, toots?

The cover of **Bone 9** (Cartoon Books, $2.95) shares with *Plasm* an effective compositional device of showing a sympathic character or group from behind a threatening, towering adversary; here the similarities end. *Bone* showcases the delightful work of Jeff Smith, an artist with the infuriating habit of appearing able to draw anything he likes with ease – I hate him so much. Smith's simple compositions, supple line and – particularly – his use of body language can easily cope with the challenges of his humans and toons co-existing in a picturesque fantasy setting, as the story veers between bittersweet romance and cartoon capers. Two pages of letters comparing Smith with the likes of Walt Kelly and Walt Disney make for a really dull letter column, but highlight the deserved appreciation of this delightful comic.

Grappling with *Bone* for the honour of sweetest book in the comic shop is **Maison Ikkoku** (Viz Select, $2.95), a translation of an early manga by *Ranma ½* creator Rumiko Takahashi. This second issue shows the type of thing respectful Japanese girls get to read while the boys' pulses race to *Akira* or *Appleseed*. Anyone out there who isn't a respectful Japanese girl might also find much to enjoy in the issue, such as the observations of city apartment living and the touches of boy-manga storytelling devices, such as speed-lines and distorted perspective, at the most emotionally charged moments; some will find the confection too sugary.

Candy and kittens are probably the

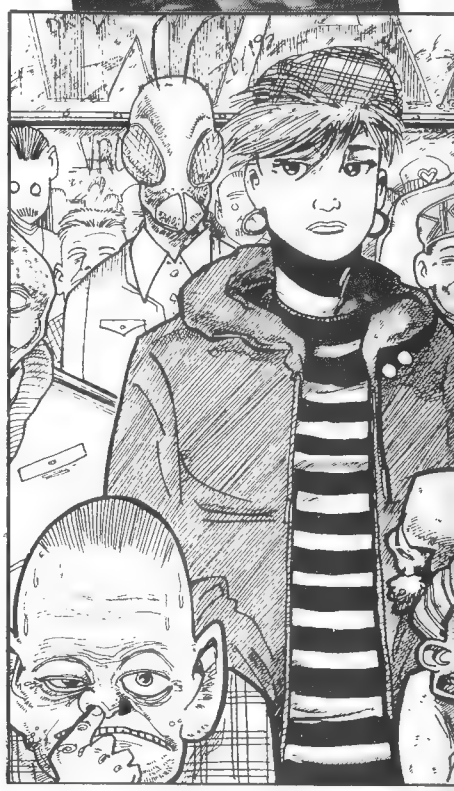
last things on John Constantine's mind in **Hellblazer 69** (Vertigo, $1.95); although the storyline is concerned in affairs of the heart of a different hue. Constantine's life has fallen apart, and he's tired of it. Just when he's at his lowest ebb, a deadly enemy returns. While Ennis and Dillon's tale, full of overtones of sex and death, is certainly compelling, it offers no hope, no optimism. In this place, light kills.

Marvel UK's new Frontier imprint seems to be chasing the horror faction of the Vertigo audience with its mini-series **Children Of The Voyager**. In this first issue ($2.95), Sam Wantling is plagued by disturbing dreams: something is after him – but what? Don't fret; the editorial page at the end has all the answers. Well done, Marvel Marketing Division, another winner. Nick Abadzis, writer of the popular and highly personal *Deadline* strip 'Hugo Tate', seems here to be treading water, with an unconvincing story of tissue paper characters and situations: even if the central mystery of the plot hadn't been given away, it's doubtful you'd care enough to come back for the second issue.

Think what you like about **Eightball**, but don't try to tell me creator Dan Clowes isn't striving towards originality. This eleventh issue (Fantagraphics, $2.95) maintains the title's anthology format; the first story is pretty weird and it just gets stranger from there. The most successful stories are those which contrast the strangeness with so-called normality, showing that no-one's as normal as they like to think they are.

Deadline 54 (Deadline, £1.95), mind you, seems a lot more normal than it used to be. At five years of age, it's positively middle aged in anthology terms; once a rough diamond, the tide of time has polished many of its faces. It's perhaps more of a readable gem than ever, though. Shaky Kane's pieces remain as impenetrably wonderful as ever while Rachel Ball's work grows in maturity. New find Roberto Corona's stuff would be stereotype student/party/gig fluff were it not providing an overdue correction of Birmingham's rock bore reputation. My personal high spot for this issue is Evan Dorkin's 'Pirate Corps' reprint, which captures a very male dippy sentimentality for lost love.

More Dorkin in **Milk And Cheese's Fourth Number One 1** (Slave Labor, $2.50), a compilation of the diary duo's outbursts. The title is of course a dry dig at the peculiarities of comics marketing; once inside, subtlety is thrown out of the window (tied to a piano for a louder



impact). The basic stategy of each strip is to pick a target worthy of derision and kick it. Repeatedly. Reading *Milk And Cheese* is like watching a dog grabbing hold of a helpless toy and shaking it until all the stuffing falls out. This becomes wearing if the comic is read in one go, but in short doses *Milk And Cheese* is necessary therapy.

Lloyd Dangle also gets some things off his chest in **Dangle 2** (Drawn And Quarterly, $2.95). It's an autobiographical-style comic of vignettes and monologues; nothing is given enough time to really scratch beneath the surface of a situation, but it's thoughtful and entertaining material all the same. The crude, lively cartooning lends Dangle's work an air of jotting off a personal letter to his readers, with each of whom he's on first name terms.

And Bob (or whatever your name was again), if you're off to UKCAC, have a good one. Buy something different.

Richard Hill

Review copies courtesy of Birmingham's Fantastic Store (Telephone 021-643 3667). Where prices are quoted in dollars, the sterling rate may vary slightly from shop to shop.

REVIEWS

When I was a kid I used to do all the usual kid things, and that's the last thing you want to be reading about, because you did them too. But I'll tell you one of them and maybe you'll remember it for yourself.

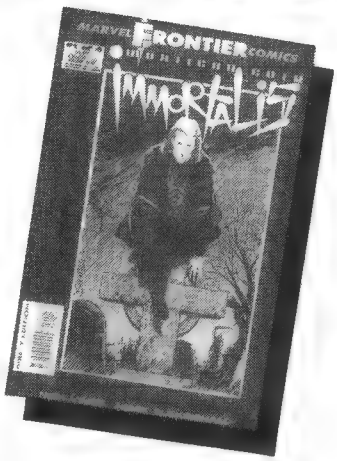
I used to read a lot of books, and sometimes the only way was to get down under the sheets with a torch because it was after lights out. In that feeble little light full of hot, trapped breath there was me, and there was the book, and that was all there was. Sometimes I'd finish the book and lay in the dark, thinking about it, or* thinking *I was thinking about it, only to find that when I opened my eyes it was morning and I'd been dreaming.

Comics are growing up. And some comics are being smacked and told to act their age and grow up into sensible, well-behaved adult comics whether they like it or not. The* Dark Knight *generation is giving way to the Vertigo generation of comics for older kids, and, not surprisingly, others are following.

Marvel UK have launched Marvel Frontier Comics. What we have in Frontier is a self-confessed attempt to publish something harder-edged and grittier, an imprint for mature readers. All of them have 'Suggested For Mature Readers' on the cover, and the first thing I do when I pick up* Children of the Voyager *is crawl under the bedclothes and check out the glow-in-the-dark cover, so maybe I've not grown up that much after all. But have the comics?

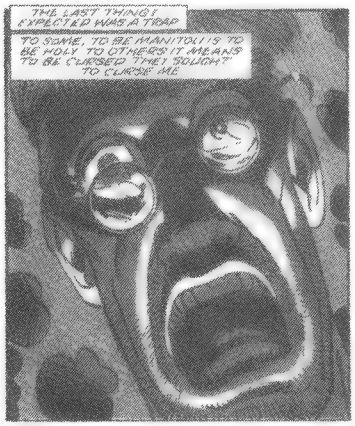
Children of the Voyager #1 ($2.95) sets up the classic horror scenario of isolate the hero(ine) and make sure the reader knows something big and nasty is coming. Its set up in deft strokes, introducing the nasty (but not all of it – you have to keep something back for the rest of the series) then cutting to the hero, Sam Wantling, a writer with problems. He's made a success of turning dreams into horror and fantasy novels, but now the dreams start to get too realistic; nightmares

become daymares, he believes he's hallucinating a lot, his girlfriend has caught him 'speaking in tongues', and he daren't sleep for fear that he will be



plucked away somewhere. His problems escalate: his girlfriend leaves and in his latest dream he sees his...sister? He has no sister!

This is all handled very nicely by writer Nick Abadzis and artist Paul Johnson, building up Sam's isolation and stress with the occasional lapse in dialogue – however tired you get no-one says "I must've slept not twelve hours". But the nit-picking proves that the majority of the story is successful. It keeps apace in **#2** ($1.95, expensive stuff luminescent paint) in which Sam is introduced to a witch and learns that he's a soulless seed of an ancient entity, and daddy wants to absorb him...pretty bad end to a lousy day, eh?


THE LAST THING I EXPECTED WAS A TRAP
TO SOME, TO BE MANITOU IS TO BE HOLY TO OTHERS IT MEANS TO BE CURSED THEY SOUGHT TO CURSE ME

Dances With Demons ($2.95) begins much the same way – introduce the big nasty, isolate the hero – then heads off in much the same direction, with the big nasty on the trail to gather up and absorb the power of the Ghost Dancer. Same situation, different clothing, and under the bedclothes I'm left in the dark with nothing for my extra $1.

The big nasty here is Manitou, a big toothy demon with lots of little demons clinging to him like old dandruff, following the soul from one just-deceased Ghost Dancer to the next chosen body, using human entrails like a compass. There's a wonderful line which is a great example of the writer (Simon Jowett) knowing more than the character should: a beat cop called out to investigate a multiple murder recalls another one he'd seen earlier and says "It's moving in a straight line, Lieutenant. From South Central to here to...Beverly Hills". How presumptive.

Nothing as cerebral as absorption in **Bloodseed #1** ($1.95), just evisceration. Naked, the hero remembers nothing of his past and tracks through the snow, falls over, and remembers everything except how he got from the gloriously paradise-like Elysium where he was king to being face down in the snow. No time to rest, monsters leap out of nowhere and...vanish. It's a vision.

A siren voice leads him to a vaulted chamber full of ancient technology where he meets a naked woman. No time to check her out, she reveals herself to be a monster, but she doesn't attack him. Onwards and upwards through the chamber. No time to savour the cold air, monsters are killing a pterodactyl. So he jumps in, saves the leathery bird, which is telepathic. It can heal itself with 'telekinesis', moves a few things around (presumably), gets better, and they fly south. The bird tells him his name is Bloodseed, a new one created by demi-gods called the Masters, and gives him some clothes and 'the helmet of truth'. He reaches the lowlands. No time to admire their lowness, a monster attacks and...vanishes. It's a vision.

He finds a way station, learns that his world is a degenerated genetic experiment, is visited by a memory of his wife (six of them in fact), feels so defiled that he swears the Masters will pay in blood. He walks through a tunnel. No time to be walking, a monster spider-thing attacks. He escapes, finds himself looking down upon a huge golden building. No time to look! Monster attack time again!

More next month.

Immortalis #1 ($2.95) shows more of the traditional Marvel trappings, guest-stars Dr. Strange, and has a fairly straightforward plot about a soul sold to the devil, vampires and the murder of immortals. But it benefits from all the elements by making them work within the context of a more mature story, using them thoughtfully, and – in drawing them together – introducing a lot of information without slowing the story down to snails pace.

I've not mentioned the artwork, which is uniformly fine, with perhaps Johnson and Mark Buckingham (*Immortalis*) standing out. Liam Sharp's *Bloodseed* art has all the raw, chopping energy that the trite story lacks, and Charlie Adlard & Rod Ramos turn in an no-real-complaints job on *Dances*.

Grown up comics? Comics without superheroes, yes. Mostly nicely written and drawn, yes. But grown up? No. Not until they're so compelling that I remain under the bedclothes and read them till dawn.

Neil Cooper

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ABBREVIATIONS

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M.	Mint Perfect
N.M.	Nearly Mint
V.F./V.F.N.	Very Fine
F.N.	Fine
V.G.	Very Good
G.	Good
F.	Fair
P.	Poor
B.S.	Bookshop Stamp on Cover
T.S.	Taped Spine
R.S.	Rolled Spine
M.C.	Marked Cover
W.B.	Water Bent
P.S.	Price Stamp

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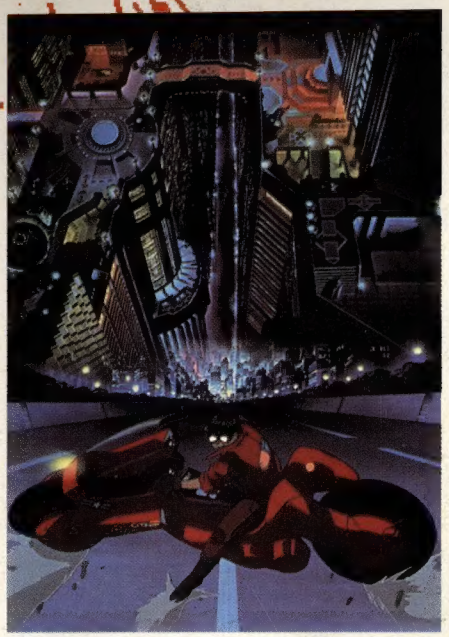

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